

Tales from  
**DRAGON COUNTRY**



KUSUM KAPUR

In this collection of Tales from Dragon Country Kusum Kapur has captured the spirit of Bhutan and its people.

There are tales of adventure in the form of skirmishes with giants and demons, of tragedy in the stories of star-crossed lovers, and of humour in the exploits of Moten Phago and Dawa. While the folk tales about the mischievous monkey and the pesky toad provide plenty of fun, others like 'The Master-Craftsmen' and 'The Borrowed Gho' are shrewd comments on human relationships.

The stories are told with sensitivity and reflect the affection and understanding which the author developed for the people of Bhutan during the two years of her stay in this beautiful mountain kingdom.

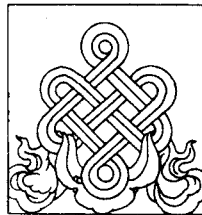
Twenty-six striking illustrations by Tapas Guha enhance the enjoyment of these delightful tales. +

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DRAGON COUNTRY



For  
The Children of Druk Yul,  
Land of the Peaceful Dragon

*Tales from*  
**DRAGON COUNTRY**



KUSUM KAPUR  
Illustrated by TAPAS GUHA



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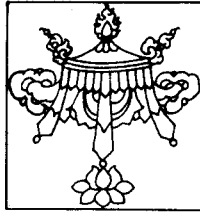
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# Preface



This book has been written with a specific purpose—to pay tribute to the children among whom I lived and worked for two years, the children of Druk Yul (Dragon Country), usually known as Bhutan.

My interest in the country began in the seventies when I came in contact with people who had spent some years there and had come to love it. My desire to visit this fascinating land of the Drukpas, as the inhabitants of Druk Yul are called, materialized in 1980 when I undertook a teaching post in the Central School at Thimphu. Before I left for Bhutan I read something of the history and geography of the land. But I was unprepared for the exotic beauty of the country: its rugged mountains, deep valleys, fast flowing rivers and thick forests. All of which was enhanced by the majestic *dzongs* (fortresses), monasteries and colourful prayer flags which stood resplendent above all places of worship.

I consider myself fortunate that I was able to teach in Bhutan, for it was through the children, who were mostly of peasant stock, that I came to know and appreciate the country and its people.

As a people, I found the Bhutanese simple, trustworthy, honest, friendly, hospitable and deeply religious. There is no home without an altar dedicated to the Buddha, where an oil lamp constantly burns. They enjoy dancing and sports and actively participate in all religious festivals. The children seem to have been endowed with an inherent sense of respect and discipline, no doubt as a result of their Buddhist training and learning.

On one occasion, I accompanied a group of senior boys and girls to the annual *tsechu*, a religious festival in the valley of Paro; and had the good fortune to spend a couple of days in a village, in the house of a farmer. The house, like all other village houses, was built of wood, stone, and clay, and the roofs were of slats of pine. On the ground floor was the cattle shed, and the living rooms on the upper floor; a loft which served as a store for grains and seeds was at the top. The arched windows with wooden shutters, which let in light and air were small and almost touched the floor. The stairs leading to the upper floor and granary consisted of a single trunk of a pine tree, cut vertically in half, with niches carved



into it as steps. The stairs were the only problem I faced during my visit. I realized how unsuitable my dress, a sari, was for life in a Bhutanese village.

We always had our meals in the main living room, sitting on the floor in a circle. The food would be prepared in advance by the farmer's wife and kept warm on the hearth in one corner of the room.

After the evening meal was over, the boys and girls would sing the traditional folk songs of Bhutan. These were later translated for me. After the songs were over, one of the older members of the family would begin to narrate folk tales. It was then the idea came to me that I should write down some of the stories I had heard.

It was a memorable experience, this visit to Paro. And on my return to Thimphu my search for folk tales began. During week-ends and holidays, I would scour the countryside with the help of a Dzongkha interpreter, in search of any venerable peasant who had a story to offer.

More often than not, the trips were futile; many confessed that they were unable to recall the stories they had once known. Nevertheless, I persisted and managed to gather together a quantity of folklore and legends. The difficult part came later, to sift through them so as to select a diversity of the most interesting ones. Often, there were variations in the same story related by various persons, but, by and large, the elements remained the same—demons, gods and goddesses, kings and queens, saints, simple farmers, and personified animals.

I sincerely hope this selection of stories will give children of other lands a glimpse into the life of their brothers and sisters in the mountain kingdom of Druk Yul and the opportunity of sharing in the enjoyment of some of the wonderful tales that are told there.

### *Acknowledgements*

I should like to express my gratitude to those who have helped me: to Dorji Gyaltsen, Dzongkha Reader of the Education Department, Thimphu, who not only translated some of the stories he knew, but who also helped me in my quest for others; to Sarah, Samuel and Rivka Israel who edited my work and gave me the encouragement I needed; to Kinley Wangchuk (Home Ministry) and Kinley Gyaltsen (Special Commission), trainees in Ecole Francaise D'Extreme Orient, Pondicherry, whose help I found invaluable; to the members of the Embassy of Bhutan in New Delhi for their assistance; to all those friends, too numerous to mention individually who gave me their precious time and unstinting help in the collection and writing of these stories; to Tapas Guha for his very apt and delightful illustrations; and to Mosaic Books for publishing this selection of my retelling of tales I was told by my friends in Dragon Country.

# Why Bhutan is 'Dragon Country'



A long time ago, seven hundred years and more before our times, at Ralung in the country of Ta Fung which we now call Tibet, a boy was born. He was destined to become the founder of the religious sect which later came to rule Lho Mon, the country now known as *Druk Yul*, Dragon Country, or Bhutan.

The boy, Tsangpa Jarey Yeshey Dorji, was religiously inclined and when Lama Pema Dorji arrived from Lingpa to preach the teachings of Lord Buddha, Yeshey Dorji would always be found sitting cross-legged at the feet of the master, listening with avid attention, and occasionally asking questions.

The great lama was drawn to this child, who was so keen to know and understand his religion, and soon declared that he intended taking him under his care.

When Yeshey Dorji's father and mother came to know of this, they felt an act of providence had brought Lama Pema Dorji to Ralung. They considered it a great honour that their son would enter the priesthood under the tutelage of this learned monk.

When Yeshey Dorji reached manhood, Lama Pema Dorji decided it was time to send his disciple to Lho Lumpa or Bhutan where he could establish a monastery and spread his teachings. And so Yeshey Dorji, with a small band of monks, set out to accomplish this mission. They crossed the bleak and barren wastes of the mountainous region of central Ta Fung on foot, and as they neared the pass, Tapa La, they were amazed to see a triple rainbow in the clear blue sky. Considering this a good omen, they proceeded on their way towards Lho Lumpa, where their master, the revered Lama Pema Dorji had told them to establish a monastery.

The stark desolation of the wind-swept land, with its ancient craggy rocks towering against the sky, did not deter this zealous group. They continued their journey, following a narrow path along the precipitous mountain slope, stopping only at nightfall to rest and eat some of the simple food they had carried with them.

The vast mountain region was desolate and uninhabited. The rugged slopes

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were barren except for some shrubs which Yeshey Dorji recognized as the wild *seva chang chubb*, a kind of wild rose.

'We will go no further,' he told his followers. 'I will make my monastery here, and name it "Seva Chang Chubb Gon-pa".'

Looking around for a site on which to build, he and his followers chanced upon some open ground which suited their purpose. Nearby they found a *thab*, an open fireplace, probably left there by some thoughtful traveller. Beside the *thab* some dry firewood had been neatly heaped. And a short distance away was a small pool of fresh water. The monks immediately set about lighting the fire on which they put a pot of water to boil for tea.

It was a clear winter day, the sun was shining, not a cloud could be seen in the sky. The monks sat drinking their tea, when suddenly the roar of thunder was heard. Yeshey Dorji looked towards the heavens expecting to see some signs of a storm, but the sky was clear. Again the sound of thunder, louder than before, rent the air. The monks, startled by the strange and ominous sounds, huddled together and looked towards their leader, whose passive and calm countenance reassured them.

'There is nothing to fear. Listen!' he said. Once again the sound of thunder echoed louder than before.

Then, in the silence that followed, Yeshey Dorji looked calmly around at his companions.

'Did you hear the thunder, the sound of the dragon?' he asked. They nodded.

'It is *tendrel zangpo*, a good omen; such an auspicious sign cannot be ignored. We need go no further. We shall build our monastery here and call it *Nam Drug* rather than Seva Chang Chubb Gon-pa. Thrice we have heard the roar of the thunder-dragon. My preachings will spread throughout all the places in the world where the sound of thunder is heard.'

That is how the word *drug* or *druk*, meaning dragon, came into being. And Ralung, the place of Tsangpa Jarey Yeshey Dorji's birth, became Druk Ralung, a monastic centre that grew to become the headquarters of the Je Khempo, the prince abbot of the Drukpa sect.

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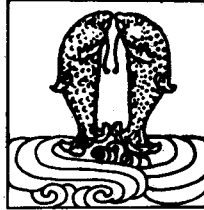
Yeshey Dorji founded the Drukpa Kargyue sect of Buddhism, but it was not until much later, after his death in AD 1211, that the chief monasteries of Yeshey Dorji passed to his nephew, Sangye Yonre Dharma Singye, whose disciple, Phajo Drugom Shigpo, first introduced the teachings of Yeshey Dorji into *Lho Mon*. The country then came to be called Drug-Yul and its inhabitants Drukpa.

Thus in Bhutan, the word *drug* or *druk*, does not signify a fearful monster breathing fire and wrath, as do the dragons in the stories and legends of the West.

The thunder dragon of Druk Yul stands for peace; though it is stern when the situation demands this, it is equally a kind and protective creature of infinite strength.

The emblem of the white dragon on the national flag of Druk Yul symbolizes what the country stands for: and indicates the unity, purity and loyalty of Druk Yul's many races and groups. The snarling mouth portrays the strength of the male and female deities which protect the country and its people. The jewels which it clasps in its claws are symbols of the aspirations of the Bhutanese people for the prosperity and happiness of their land.

# The White Bird



There once dwelt in the village of Kei-mei-tshel, which in *Dzongkha*, the Bhutanese language, means 'flower garden', a rich farmer who had three daughters.

The eldest, Nyima, was beautiful, but she was vain and had an unduly high opinion of herself. So much so, that she refused all suitors who sought her hand in marriage. The second, Wangmo, was also beautiful, but she was ambitious. She was not content to spend the rest of her life in a village, married to a farmer. She had decided that she would marry only a prince or, failing that, a man of noble birth. But until then, neither prince nor noble had come her way. The youngest, Pem Pem, was by far the loveliest. She was also the sweetest, gentlest and most caring of all three sisters. She wished only to tend the animals on her father's farm, and work in the fields. Her sisters thought her foolish and had little time for her.

Each day, the three daughters, in turn, would take their father's buffaloes out to graze on the mountain slopes. One day, while Nyima, the eldest, was out with the buffaloes, it began to rain. She found shelter under a large overhanging rock on the mountainside. It rained all day and Nyima grew tired and soon fell asleep. When she awoke she found that the sun had set; it had stopped raining, but the buffaloes were nowhere to be seen.

'Father will be angry if I return without the buffaloes,' thought Nyima. She searched for them everywhere, climbing higher and higher up the mountain.

Climbing a particularly steep ridge, she paused to rest for a moment, and, in the rocky cliff above her, she saw a bronze door deeply embedded in a rock. The door had an exquisite handle shaped like a shell. Nyima reached up and turned the handle. The door yielded to her touch and she found herself in a large cave. At the far end of it was a silver door which had a handle in the shape of a dragon.

Gently Nyima turned the dragon handle and pushed open the silver door. She found herself in a smaller cave, at the far end of which was a golden door which glowed in the darkness of the cave. It had a handle in the form of a beautiful bird. Nyima, overcome by curiosity, hurried to the golden door and opened it.

'Oh!' she gasped, for the cave was filled with gold, silver and precious gems

which glittered and shone in the darkness. In the centre of the cave was a magnificent throne studded with diamonds, rubies and emeralds. And on the throne there sat a white bird.

Nyima looked at the bird in amazement.

'Who are you?' she asked.

'I am a prince,' came the reply, 'and I guard this treasure. And who are you?'

'A prince,' thought Nyima, 'Did the bird really think she was so stupid as to take him for a prince? Well, let him continue to think so.'

'I am Nyima,' she replied. 'I look after my father's buffaloes. They are lost. Will you help me find them?'

'Yes, I will,' the bird answered, 'but only if you consent to become my wife.'

'Become your wife!' cried Nyima in horror. 'Do you really think I would consider marrying a bird? You silly creature, I would far rather marry the prince who owns all this fabulous wealth! I'll find my buffaloes without your help,' she said rudely, as she walked out of the cave.

But, search as she might, she could not find the buffaloes.

The following day, Wangmo, the second daughter, went in search of the buffaloes. Nyima had told her about the white bird, the bronze door in the rock, and of all the fabulous wealth she had seen in the cave. But she had not told her of the ridiculous proposal.

So when Wangmo was unable to find the buffaloes, she climbed the cliff face and searched for the bronze door. It was not difficult to find because Nyima had told her exactly where to go. She went fearlessly through the three doors until she came to the room with the throne in it. There she found the white bird seated on the throne bedecked with precious stones.

'I'm looking for my buffaloes. Can you help me find them?' Wangmo asked the bird.

'I will help you,' came the reply, 'if you agree to marry me.'

Wangmo ran out of the cave and tore down the hill. 'Marry a bird,' she thought, as she ran. 'And here I have waited so long to marry a prince!'

Early next morning, Pem Pem was sent by her father in search of the buffaloes. All day she searched the mountain slopes for the lost animals. Late in the evening, she came to the bronze door in the rock. At first she hesitated, for it was growing dark and she was afraid. Then, her curiosity aroused, she entered the cave, and seeing the silver door, opened it and went through to the cave with the golden door. That, too, swung open as she turned the handle, and she stared in astonishment at the glittering jewels. But the sight of the white bird really filled her with delight.

'Come, little bird,' she whispered softly, as she went towards it and gently stroked it with her hand. 'Tell me, have you seen my buffaloes?'



The sight of the white bird filled her with delight.



'I have,' replied the bird. 'I shall tell you where to find them if you will marry me.'

'Yes, if you wish, I will marry you,' said Pem Pem. 'But first, please help me find my buffaloes.'

So it came to pass that the strange white bird told Pem Pem where she could find her buffaloes, and then the two were married. They lived together in the cave within the rock with the doors of bronze, silver and gold.

Time passed, and when the annual religious festival, *tsechu*, came, and celebrations began in the valley, the white bird persuaded Pem Pem to join in the festivities. Alone, she went to the *dzong*, the fortress, and watched silently as the masked dances were performed by the monks. Every day, at every function, she would notice a stranger, a handsome young man mounted on a blue horse. Pem Pem thought he was the most splendid young man she had ever seen.

The *tsechu* festival lasted several days, and the day before the celebrations were to end, as Pem Pem was returning from the *dzong*, she saw an old woman seated by the roadside.

'Old woman, can you tell me who is the man on the blue horse who goes to the *dzong* each day?' she asked.

The old woman smiled and shook her head. 'That, I cannot tell you, my child,' she replied. 'Tomorrow, pretend that you are going to attend the *tsechu* festivities as usual, then hide behind the door, and you will see what is to be seen.'

Pem Pem did as she was instructed. The next morning, she said farewell to the white bird and then leaving the bronze door ajar, she hid behind it.

No sooner had she hidden herself than to her amazement, her husband was transformed into the handsome youth she had seen each day at the *tsechu* celebrations. He mounted the blue horse which stood nearby and proceeded on his way to the *dzong*.

As soon as the horse's hoofs had died away in the distance, Pem Pem picked up the bird skin she found lying inside the cave. She ran outside with it, and removing all the feathers she scattered them to the four winds. The skin she threw far into the valley. Then satisfied with what she had done, she eagerly awaited her husband's return.

'What have you done?' were the first words the young prince uttered as he entered the cave. 'You have forfeited my life to the demons.'

'I do not understand,' cried Pem Pem helplessly.

'The demons cast a spell on me when my father, the king, banished them from his kingdom. I was turned into a white bird, and made to guard their treasure. And so I remain except for a few hours each day when I change back to my human shape. As you have destroyed my feather mantle, I am helpless. The demons will soon come for me.'

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'Oh, tell me how I can help you!' cried Pem Pem as she wrung her hands in despair.

'There is nothing you can do except keep the demons away,' he cried. 'Quickly, take a blazing torch and stand with it in the doorway. Brandish it when the demons appear. They are afraid of fire, they will keep away.'

For six days and six nights Pem Pem kept the torch blazing and frightened the demons away. On the seventh day, her eyes heavy with sleep, she dropped the torch on the ground and it flickered out. Stealthily, the demons appeared. They raised the still form of her husband and carried him away. When she awoke she discovered her husband had disappeared.

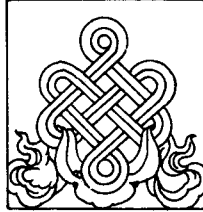
Day after day, weary, her heart filled with remorse, Pem Pem searched in vain for her husband. Through the valleys, high up in the mountains and into the deep forests she went. One day, when she had given up hope of ever seeing him again, she heard a mournful lament coming from the forest in the mountains. Then, suddenly, a shadowy form appeared. She ran excitedly to meet him, for she knew her husband had returned.

'Don't come near me,' he cried, 'I have found a way to remove this spell, but you must not come near me until it is done. Go quickly into the valley and find the skin and the feathers which you threw away. Make the mantle which I had before, and by sunrise your work must be done. Leave it here under this tree, then go down into the valley and wait for me. Last night I heard the demons talk while they thought I was asleep. One of them said that if I burn the mantle of feathers while they are all together, they will disappear in the smoke. Then I will be free of the spell.'

All night long, by the light of the moon, Pem Pem searched for the feathers in the valley below the cave, and collected them, one by one. Then, finding the skin where she had thrown it, she returned to the cave; she frantically stitched the feathers into place. Once again she ran up the mountain towards the forest, and before sunrise she had placed the bird skin under the tree. Then down in the valley she awaited her husband's return.

At dusk he came, the handsome young man she had first seen on the blue horse. She ran joyously to greet him, and together, they went for the last time, to the cave. They found to their astonishment it was no longer there; bare rocky cliffs rose above them; there was no bronze door embedded in the rock! Their happiness was complete, for they knew then that the spell had been finally broken.

# The Three Wishes



Old Ugen Tenzin lived in the Ha valley in western Bhutan. He was, at one time, a wealthy trader, but due to a series of misfortunes he lost all he possessed.

Now, Ugen Tenzin had a childhood friend, Jampel Dodo, who was a very wealthy farmer. He had a huge mansion, extensive fields and numerous cattle. He also had a large and happy family.

One day, the two old friends met on their way to the market. After a brief but affectionate greeting, Ugen Tenzin asked his prosperous friend the secret of his success.

‘Ah!’ said the farmer, ‘This is what I do. Once, at the beginning of every month, I go to the *gompa*, Lhakhang Karpo, in the western mountains, and I thank Ap-Chhundu for his blessings.’

‘Is that all?’ asked his astonished friend.

‘Yes, that’s all,’ he replied.

All the way to the market and back home, Ugen Tenzin pondered on what the rich farmer had said. He could not believe that his friend had merely thanked the deity for his blessings. There had to be something more to it than that. So he decided to follow Jampel Dodo the next time he went to the monastery.

On an auspicious day at the beginning of the next month, Jampel Dodo set off on his monthly pilgrimage and Ugen Tenzin stealthily followed him through the village and along the path that led to the mountains. Ugen Tenzin’s progress was slow. He had to dodge behind boulders and trees to avoid being spotted. Nevertheless, as he reached the *gompa*, he saw Jampel Dodo enter the *lhakhang*, the inner temple, where the god Ap-Chhundu resided.

What happened next was in no way out of the ordinary. Jampel Dodo burned incense which he then placed at the foot of the statue. Then he muttered some inaudible words and made an offering of a *khadbar*, a white silk ceremonial scarf, to the deity and left.

Ugen Tenzin, who had hidden behind a pillar in the courtyard of the monastery, entered the *lhakhang* as soon as his friend left it. He had neither incense to burn, nor a *khadbar* to offer, but he prayed fervently. And to his amazement a common peasant appeared before him.



He had to dodge behind boulders and trees to avoid being spotted

'What do you want of me, Ugen Tenzin?' inquired the peasant.

Ugen Tenzin was speechless.

'Ha, ha, ha!' laughed the peasant, 'You are, no doubt, surprised. What did you expect to see? A vision in a golden light! Yes, I am, indeed, Ap-Chhunddu. Now tell me what you want. Is it something great or small? I will deal with it accordingly.'

Ugen Tenzin fell to his knees. If what the peasant said was true, and he *was* Ap-Chhunddu, then his wish would be granted. He bowed low. Then he looked up at the simple peasant before him.

'I want wealth,' he cried ardently. 'I want all that I had the misfortune to lose, and more besides.'

'Then,' said the deity, 'this is what you must do. On the night of the full moon climb on to the roof of your house at sunset. Burn incense, keep a *trho*, a metal vessel, filled with *chhang*, before you, and hold a green prayer flag in your hand. Wait for me there. You must not speak of this to anyone.'

Ugen Tenzin returned home highly elated. He could scarcely hide his exuberance. He wanted to tell the world the wonderful news. Then he remembered, in time, the deity's warning.

So he waited patiently. And on the night of the full moon, he went up to the roof of his house and prepared for the arrival of Ap-Chhunddu. While he waited his thoughts returned to the day when he first met the deity. He had asked for 'wealth' he remembered. This time when the deity appeared his request would be more specific. He would ask for a large mansion, plenty of land and cattle.

Suddenly his thoughts were interrupted by the glare of an unsteady light which came from the direction of the monastery in the western mountains. As it drew nearer, Ugen Tenzin, tense with excitement, knew that the deity would soon reveal himself. To his horror, what should appear before him but a huge dragon! The gigantic head peered over the top of the roof, its mouth spouting flames and sparks of fire.

At first, Ugen Tenzin cringed with fear; then in his haste to get away he overturned the *trho*, the flag and the incense.

'Do not be afraid Ugen Tenzin,' said the dragon in a loud voice. 'I have come to grant your wish. You may name three things which your heart desires.'

But the sight of the dragon had so frightened the old man that he quite forgot what he wanted, and he uttered the first word that came to his mind.

'Zohsoi!' he cried.

Now the word *Zohsoi* means 'finish' in Dzongkha, and whether the deity understood that Ugen Tenzin had nothing further to say, or that the dragon should be gone, one will never know. But at that instant, the deity disappeared, and with him went the only chance Ugen Tenzin ever had of regaining his fortune!

## Gaden in the Sky



Long ago in the valley of Thimphu in western Bhutan, there lived a venerable old Buddhist monk, Lama Gyalwa Shacha of the Pha-jo-ding monastery. The monastery, high up in the valley, was built on the sheer face of the cliffs of the towering mountains. Between the winter snows and the summer rains, the narrow precipitous trail leading to it was wet and dangerous. As the monastery was inaccessible for a great part of the year, the head lama, Gyalwa Shacha, his disciples, and a small band of monks, lived in seclusion in their mountain retreat. Their time was spent in the study of Buddhist scriptures, in prayer and meditation.

Lama Gyalwa Shacha had under his guardianship two *gelongs*, fully ordained monks, who were by far the cleverest among his followers. These two young monks, Yonten Thaye and Pel Singye had mastered, among other things, the art of oratory and discussion. Therefore, when Buddhist scholars from all over the east were called upon to attend the religious debate at the Gaden monastery in Tibet, Lama Gyalwa Shacha selected his two most promising disciples to represent the Pha-jo-ding monastery. This debate was considered one of the most difficult debates of its time. Covering all aspects of the Buddhist religion, it was a test for those who had attained complete understanding and mastery of the holy scriptures; and the proof of the monks' competence to teach and spread Buddhism.

Now a journey in those days was not what it is today, particularly in the mountainous region of the Himalaya. It had to be made on foot, or on horses or mules. The rugged mountain bordered one side of the narrow mule track, while the other side lay dangerously exposed to the valley below. The journey itself across the Himalaya mountains was fraught with danger; thieves and bandits waylaid the unwary travellers and wild animals on the prowl often attacked them. There was nowhere for them to shelter from the wind and the rain, save beneath overhanging rocks or inside caves.

Often it took weeks, sometimes months, for the monks, singly or in groups, to reach their destination. But used as they were to the rigours of monastic life and self-discipline and telling their prayer beads to the chant of 'Om Mani Padme Hum', they would continue their journey, oblivious of the biting winds and the

hazards of the mountain. So, when the two young monks, Yonten Thaye and Pel Singye, were about to set off for Tibet, the customary prayers were said and religious rites performed for their safe conduct.

The journey from Pha-jo-ding to Paro, which was a day's march on foot, was just the beginning of their many hardships. The hill slopes along which they descended into the valley lay almost barren, with sparse vegetation. There were no streams along the way where they could quench their thirst, and the small amount of water they carried had to suffice till they reached their destination.

When they arrived at Paro they decided to spend the night at the Drugyel Dzong, then proceed over the Tremo La, pass, to the Phari Dzong, another two days' journey on foot into Tibet. They journeyed westwards over the mountains and finally reached Lhasa, the capital.

The fame of the two young monks from Druk Yul, Bhutan, had already preceded them, rousing the jealousy of a certain group of monks who had arrived earlier. It had been decided by the examining body of learned lamas that, because of their brilliance, Yonten Thaye and Pel Singye would be exempted from the usual training prior to participation in the debate. As this training was compulsory for the others, the resentment against the young monks from Druk Yul grew and a group of three monks decided to make certain that Yonten Thaye and Pel Singye would be disqualified from the contest even before it began.

There was only one way in which they could do it. According to tradition, every Buddhist text was considered to be an embodiment of Lord Buddha. Hence, should a sacred script be found beneath one's feet, it would be considered an act of sacrilege. As Yonten Thaye and Pel Singye were nominated to be the first to take part in the debate, the three monks decided to conceal the holy scriptures under the *zhugthi*, the ceremonial seat, on which they were to sit.

The first day of the debate dawned bright and sunny. There was an air of subdued excitement as the learned lamas resplendent in their red and yellow robes streamed into the Gaden Monastery followed by the monks clad in deep maroon. Barefoot and silent, they assembled in the courtyard of the *lhakhang* or inner temple. The walls of the courtyard were brightly decorated with *thankas*, painted scrolls depicting Lord Buddha and the Bodhisattvas.

The revered lamas who were to conduct the debate arrived and, as soon as they were settled on the *thri*, the presidential seats, the assembled spectators seated themselves on the ground in orderly files.

Yonten Thaye and Pel Singye, seated on the *zhugthi*, were unaware that the three monks had schemed to dishonour them.

Suddenly, one of them cried in an accusing voice:

'You have defiled the word of the Lord!'





'You have defiled the word of the Lord!'

Another shouted:

'You have beneath you the sacred scriptures of the Lord Buddha!'

And yet another voice said:

'You call yourselves disciples of the Lord?'

The two innocent monks were aghast at the accusations.

'No,' protested Pel Singye, 'we have nothing but the *zhugthi* beneath us.'

'Look under the *zhugthi*, and see what you find,' mocked a voice from the assembly.

Apprehensive of what might have been concealed below the *zhugthi* without their knowledge, the two monks from Druk Yul raised it slowly. There, to their utter disbelief, lay the sacred scriptures wrapped in the customary saffron silk.

Immediately, whisperings began, then mutterings which grew to grumblings, and the protests grew louder. The two bewildered monks, at the Head Lama's insistence, unfolded the saffron silk for all to see. There was dead silence as the silk cloth was unwrapped, and then a gasp of astonishment when, not the scriptures, but just a bundle of blank sheets of paper fell out.

No more was said. The debate continued and finally the results were declared. Yonten Thaye and Pel Singye, who had won the debate, prepared to take their leave. As they were about to depart, the three monks who had attempted to dishonour them sought to make amends. They admitted their guilt. At first, the two young innocents could not believe that anything but blank papers had been placed under the *zhugthi*.

'You mean to say that you placed the holy scriptures there?' asked the incredulous Yonten Thaye.

They nodded in assent.

'Then it is indeed a miracle,' said Pel Singye.

And the word soon spread of the 'miracle of the scriptures at the Gaden debate'.

\* \* \*

As they retraced their steps homeward, Yonten Thaye and Pel Singye were mostly silent, each immersed in his own thoughts, wondering, no doubt, which of them had been blessed with such miraculous powers as to have turned the sacred scriptures into blank paper.

The return journey seemed so much shorter, and, before they were even aware of it they found themselves once more at the Drugyel Dzong at Paro. To their surprise, there was no one there to welcome them. They assumed that the news of their twofold achievement, the 'miracle of the scriptures at Gaden', and their victory in the debate had not yet reached Pha-jo-ding.

As they made their way towards Tacheluna on their homeward journey, they expressed their disappointment to each other.

16 *Tales from Dragon Country*

'Is it not strange?' said Pel Singye. 'We were sent on a mission of such importance, and there is no one to welcome us on our return!'

'In a way, I feel as you do,' replied Yonten Thaye. 'But then I think perhaps His Holiness has reasons for his actions. Let us not question the ways of the Master, it could be his way of teaching us humility. We will know soon enough, when we reach the monastery.'

Late that night, when they arrived at Pha-jo-ding monastery and sought an audience with Lama Gyalwa Shacha, they were told that he would not receive them till the following morning. Disappointed they retired quietly to their cells.

Early the next morning, when tea was being served, the two young monks were ushered into the presence of their Master. The Master blessed his disciples, and, as he did so, he raised the cup of tea to his lips, and repeated the customary prayer.

The prayer that morning was somehow different and as the two disciples bowed their heads and waited, the Lama softly hinted that the first lesson they had to learn was humility. Then he went on to say that he had gone to their assistance at Gaden because he was aware of their predicament.

When it appeared that they had not fully understood what he was implying, he took his young disciples into the *lhakhang* to pray. After they had prayed and had received the blessings of the Master for their safe return, he took them out into the sunshine. Pointing to the clear blue sky he asked them if they could see anything.

'No, nothing but the sky, Your Holiness,' was the reply.

'Look again,' he said and, saying this, he drew them close and enveloped them in the folds of his *choego*, his robe. 'Now do you see?'

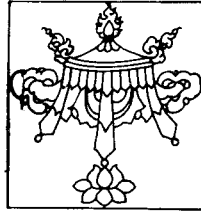
As they gazed once more into the sky, their wonder grew, for there, in a halo of light, appeared Gaden, the monastery from which they had so recently returned. Then it dawned on them that it was the Master who had wrought the 'Miracle of the holy scriptures'.

'It is Gaden!' they cried aloud, and bowed low before their master.

'Ah,' came the gentle reply, 'so now you see!'

'Come, your work is just beginning,' he said as he bid them rise.

# Tshomem



A long time ago in Lho Mon, now known as Druk Yul or Bhutan, in Sha Lekokha, a small village in the Wandiphodrang Valley, there lived a poor peasant who had to work very hard to make a living out of his small farm. It was harvest time and the poor farmer had been busy all day cutting the sun-dried stalks, tying them into bundles and stacking them in readiness for threshing.

The farmer grew tired. Towards evening, as he paused to rest, he saw what he thought at first was imaginary, a beautiful maiden standing near one of the rice stacks. She was scarcely visible in the dusk, but her dress of pure white stood out in startling contrast to the deepening shadows.

He stared dumbfounded, wondering from where she had appeared and what she was doing there at so late an hour. Suddenly she broke the silence that surrounded them.

‘May I spend the night in your farmhouse?’ she asked. ‘There is nowhere for me to stay and the hour is late.’

‘My house is small,’ apologized the farmer, ‘it can scarcely accommodate my family and myself.’

‘Then let me rest in your fields,’ she persisted. ‘If I sleep out here in the open I will not disturb you in any way.’

The farmer agreed reluctantly, ashamed that he had not even offered the stranger a small corner of the room where they all slept. Seeing that it was growing dark, he hastened on with his work and forgot all about the strange maiden until he was about to leave. He saw that she had curled up in a corner of the field and was fast asleep.

‘I must remember,’ he thought as he walked wearily home, ‘to speak to my wife. We must find the maiden a place to stay if she is still here in the morning.’

Next morning, the farmer had scarcely opened his eyes when he heard his wife cry out, ‘Wake up! Look what has happened to our rice. We are ruined!’

The farmer rushed out and joined his wife, who was wailing and wringing her hands in despair. He was horrified to find that his fields were covered with water

and a small lake had formed where the fields had once stood. And on the lake their precious stacks of rice were floating like flotsam in the sea.

The unhappy farmer grew angry; he could not understand how the lake had covered his fields, but he knew only too well that a whole year's stock of rice had been ruined, and that his family faced starvation.

So he took up a mattock and went towards the lake, determined to make a channel to drain the water out and to save some at least of his fields. As he began to dig at the nearest bank of the lake, he heard a voice cry, 'Stop!'

And there appeared from the middle of the lake a *tshomem*, a goddess that is half woman and half serpent.

'Do not ruin the lake,' she begged, 'it is now my home. In return I will help you. Near the door of your house you will find a small ox made of lac. Take it and place it where you keep your grain. You will never be in want again. Guard this secret carefully. Should anyone come to know of it, or if you lose the ox, the charm will be broken. Go now!' Saying this the *tshomem* disappeared into the waters of the lake.

The farmer, somewhat sceptical, picked up his mattock and walked back home. He was amazed to find, just as the *tshomem* had predicted, a small ox made of lac lying near the door of his house. His wife, not one to question him, wondered where he had found it and why he so zealously set it in a place of prominence on the heap of rice stored in the attic.

As time passed, the farmer grew increasingly wealthy. There was always sufficient rice for the family from the fields behind the farmhouse; and what was over and above their needs, he sold.

The farmer made no more attempts to disturb the lake. If his wife ever suggested that they could do with more fields and they should drain the lake, he would reply, 'The village that has a lake is a lucky village. We have not done so badly since it has been here, have we?'

And so the years passed; the ox stood in the farmer's granary while he became more and more prosperous. But one year, on a day on which the farmers of Sha Lekokha made images of animals out of cooked rice and offered them to the gods to seek their blessings for a bountiful harvest, our farmer decided to use his lac ox for this purpose. The ceremonies over, the model animals would be carried back home and installed in the farmers' granaries. So, the farmer expected he, too, would return his ox of lac to his granary.

The farmer had not forgotten the *tshomem*'s warning, and he did not intend to divulge the magical powers of the ox. He wished only to pay tribute to the gods by offering the ox which had brought him good fortune. So there amongst the other animals he placed his ox of lac.

But a certain rich man of the village was watching him secretly and noticed



There appeared from the middle of the lake a *tshomem*.

that the farmer had brought with him an unusual image of an ox, fashioned out of lac and not of rice as was usual.

As he watched closely, the rich man saw that the ox had moved very slowly away from the other animals. Believing that the ox was indeed bewitched, the rich man decided he would steal the farmer's treasure. He hastened home, and made a similar ox out of lac. Then, taking some *chhang*, a local drink, with him, he returned to the village and invited the farmer for a drink. The innocent farmer kept drinking the *chhang* until he was quite drunk.

Leaving the farmer asleep, the rich man took the ox he had made to the house of worship. There he placed his ox with the other model animals and stretched out his hand to pick up the farmer's ox. To his utter astonishment, the ox moved well beyond his reach. Startled, the rich man again made a grab at the lac ox. And as he laid his hand on it and tried to lift it, he found that it would not move. It seemed as if the ox had been firmly fixed to the ground. Disappointed, he picked up the ox he had made and reluctantly returned home.

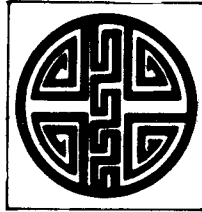
Meanwhile, the farmer had woken to find that the rich man who had befriended him was nowhere to be seen. The ceremonies being over, he picked up his ox of lac and went home. There he placed it once more amongst the grain in his attic. So, year in and year out, good fortune continued to bless the farmer and his family.

As for the rich man, calamities befell him one after another. His rice fields, which were ready for harvesting, were attacked by locusts. They swarmed over the fields and ate the grain and the stalks as well, until nothing remained to be seen of the once bountiful crop. Then hordes of rats infested his well-filled granaries, and as swiftly disappeared having caused irreparable damage. Before long, he lost his respected position in the village, and all his wealth.

Strange as it may seem, the calamities that occurred began the day that the rich farmer, in his greed, had attempted to steal the farmer's charmed ox of lac.



## The Borrowed Gho



Gele Gyalwa Dupchu was a poor shepherd who worked for a wealthy farmer. The farmer's wife was thrifty, and though kind to the poor shepherd, she seldom gave him enough to eat.

During the summer months, when he took his master's cattle to the rich pasturelands to graze, Gele Gyalwa Dupchu, deprived of his midday meal, had to manage with some rice saved from his supper the night before. Near a mountain stream, he would let the cattle graze while he ate his frugal meal.

One day, as Gele Gyalwa Dupchu finished eating and was about to drink water from the stream, he suddenly saw a beautiful girl coming towards him with a herd of cows. As she drew near she smiled, and the poor shepherd, who had seldom had a kind smile bestowed upon him, was overcome with embarrassment. The young girl seeing the discomfort of the shy youth, tried to put him at ease.

'I am Goke Zangmoi Buthi,' she said with a friendly smile. 'My father has farmlands in the valley. Who are you?'

Gele Gyalwa Dupchu remained speechless, for although he had heard of the rich farmer with the very beautiful daughter, he had never had the occasion to see either of them. Casting a furtive glance at her, he mumbled a reply and darted away, scattering the startled cattle in all directions.

The next morning, Gele Gyalwa Dupchu, eager to catch yet another glimpse of the kind and beautiful girl, hurried towards the pastures with the cattle. He waited all day, but the girl did not appear. It was after dusk when he took the cattle home. As he entered the farmhouse, the farmer's wife who had been waiting anxiously, fearing that some calamity had befallen her precious beasts, showered him with abuse.

Thereafter, day after day, Gele Gyalwa Dupchu would take the cattle out to graze, and there, beside the stream, he would wait for Goke Zangmoi Buthi. Finally, when he had given up hope of ever seeing her again, he heard the sound of cow-bells. She came towards him smiling, and sat down beside him as though it was the most natural thing in the world. Then she took out the *bangchu*, the food basket, which she carried in the folds of her *kira* and shared her rice with

the shepherd. And he, no longer shy, spoke to her of his life and the hardships he had to endure on the farm.

Gele Gyalwa Dupchu's heart was filled with happiness, but he kept the secret of his encounter with Goke Zangmoi Buthi to himself. And if the farmer or his wife noticed any sudden change in the shepherd, they did not remark upon it.

The following day, the shepherd took some rice and went with the cattle to the pasture by the mountain stream. Goke Zangmoi Buthi was there waiting for him. She chided him when she saw the rice.

'See, there is enough for both of us!' she said, as she opened the *bangchu*. Together they ate the rice and the salted pork she had brought; then they drank sweet cool water from the stream.

All through the summer months they frequented the same pastures together. Their joy knew no bounds as their friendship grew. Then, one day, Goke Zangmoi Buthi asked, 'Dupchu, don't you have this strange, mystic feeling that we have met before?'

Gele Gyalwa Dupchu, now confident in his love for her, nodded. 'In some other life, Buthi, we must have been man and wife.'

'You know how much I care for you,' he continued, 'if your father agrees, will you marry me, Buthi?'

'My father will never agree,' she replied sadly. 'It is almost winter now, and he speaks of going to a nearby valley. There has been some talk of a certain rich farmer who is in search of a wife.'

The shepherd was silent for a while, then said, 'Trust in me, Buthi. I will think of some way to convince your father.'

A few days later, he took his master into confidence, who laughed when he heard how the shepherd planned to win his bride. Nevertheless, he agreed to help him, provided the clothes and the horse, which Gele Gyalwa Dupchu wanted to borrow, were returned within a week.

One fine morning, Gele Gyalwa Dupchu, wearing his borrowed finery and riding his master's horse, arrived at Goke Zangmoi Buthi's father's farm. He was received with customary hospitality and, after several cups of *suja*, butter tea, the farmer's wife who had an inquisitive nature, asked him where he was going and what was his business.

'I am going north to Sele La, in the Ha Valley,' came the reply. 'A rich nobleman has employed me to take charge of his cattle.'

Greatly impressed by his fine clothes, his horse and his recent appointment, Goke Zangmoi Buthi's mother then asked the traveller if he was married.

'No,' he replied, 'but now that I have such excellent prospects, I will go in search of a wife who will prove to be an asset to me.'

Turning to her husband the wife suggested, 'We have a beautiful daughter. Do you not think she will be an asset to any man?'

The farmer readily agreed, and so Gele Gyalwa Dupchu was invited to stay at the farm. From dawn to dusk he busied himself about the house and in the fields. He fed the pigs and chopped wood for the fire, fetched water from the stream, and changed the shingles on the roof. When work around the farmhouse was done, he went into the fields and helped plough the land and stack the hay into the loft for the long winter months ahead. Goke Zangmoi Buthi watched him while he worked and in her heart she knew her parents would be pleased. So it came as no surprise when Gele Gyalwa Dupchu asked for her hand in marriage and her parents consented.

The parents then went to consult an astrologer and to request him to fix an auspicious day for the marriage. The day of the marriage was fixed, and preparations for the wedding began.

Now the shepherd had forgotten his promise to his master, until, one morning his master appeared at the farmhouse. At the time Gele Gyalwa Dupchu was repairing a fence in the backyard. He heard loud voices raised in anger, then shouts and abuses hurled in swift succession. Running into the house he discovered, to his horror, his master and Goke Zangmoi Buthi's father involved in a heated argument.

As Gele Gyalwa Dupchu entered the room, his master turned on him. 'You ungrateful wretch, you still have my clothes and my horse. Two weeks have passed and they are still with you. I should never have let you wear my *gho*. I have to attend a wedding and that is all I have to wear. Here, take your *gho*!' The enraged farmer threw the tattered garment at Gele Gyalwa Dupchu's feet, and stormed out of the house with his own *gho* in his hands.

Buthi's father was very angry. 'You're nothing but a worthless shepherd!' he shouted. 'You have dared to enter my house under false pretences! Get out!'

'Such deceit!' wept his wife. 'A nobody, he is nothing but a poor shepherd. We will never agree to this marriage.'

But Buthi was adamant. 'I will marry no one but Gele Gyalwa Dupchu,' she cried.

The father would not relent, and the poor shepherd was forced to leave the house. Goke Zangmoi Buthi burst into tears and ran after him, begging him to stay.

'What will become of me, Dupchu?' she asked. 'Let us go away together.'

Gently Gele Gyalwa Dupchu dried her eyes. 'Buthi,' he assured her, 'it was destined that we should meet. It is also destined that we shall be man and wife. I will return, I promise. Have faith in me.'



'You ungrateful wretch, you still have my clothes and my horse.'

Gele Gyalwa Dupchu returned to his master's farm. The farmer was secretly pleased to see the hard-working shepherd back, but deep in his heart he regretted that he had destroyed all chances of the boy's happiness. It was too late to make amends. So the poor shepherd resumed his work on the farm, and once again took the cattle to graze in the pasture.

Meanwhile, the search for a wealthy husband for Goke Zangmoi Buthi was resumed. Hearing that the rich farmer in the nearby village had not yet found a wife, the girl's father immediately despatched a messenger inviting him to pay them a visit.

Having done so, the farmer and his wife hastened to the astrologer whom they had first consulted and asked him to fix a new date for their daughter's marriage.

The astrologer was puzzled, 'But has your daughter's marriage not already taken place?'

The farmer took great pains to tell him about the shepherd and how he had deceived them. And as that marriage was no longer possible they had decided that their daughter should marry a rich man from a nearby valley.

The astrologer listened to what the farmer had to say, then shook his head, 'What you are doing is wrong. Why do you stand in the way of these two who are destined to marry? I will say no more.'

The farmer and his wife returned home disappointed. But they decided not to reveal what the astrologer had said to anyone, and began preparations for the arrival of the suitor, who was expected within a few days.

One day, as Buthi was looking out of the window of her room and anxiously awaiting Gele Gyalwa Dupchu's return, she saw some riders in the distance. As they drew nearer, she noticed that they were dressed in rich attire, and guessed immediately that this must be the wealthy man she was expected to marry, accompanied by his attendants. Afraid that there was no hope for Dupchu and herself, she burst into a paroxysm of weeping.

Meanwhile her parents, dazzled by the splendour of such affluence, ushered their distinguished visitors in and accommodated them in their house. Their enthusiasm soon waned, for they discovered that, apart from his wealth, the intended bridegroom had no redeeming feature. He was fat and ungainly, and with his coarse speech and gross manners he cut a sorry figure.

For five days, both husband and wife bore with patience the highhandedness of their guests, who expected to be waited on hand and foot; until the day came when Goke Zangmoi Buthi's mother, no longer able to keep her fears to herself, confided in her daughter, 'It grieves me that you should have to suffer such indignities for the rest of your life, my child.'

Hearing these words from her mother, Buthi ran out of the house and into the

valley where she knew she would find her beloved Dupchu. He was there with the cattle. And as they embraced she told him all that had taken place.

'What can we do Dupchu?' she cried in anguish. 'My mother is no longer happy about this marriage. But my father has given his word. I am so afraid; I see no way out.'

'Do not worry yourself so, Buthi,' he consoled her. 'There must be a way. Pretend you are going through with the marriage and leave the rest to me.'

The wedding day arrived and the festivities began. And the groom, as was customary, went down into the courtyard to take a hot bath and to dress for the wedding. Placing his *gho* on the fence, he luxuriated in the hot bath, well pleased with himself—a rich and beautiful wife and the only child of her parents. He congratulated himself on his good fortune.

His bath over, the groom stretched out his hand for his *gho* and discovered, to his amazement, that an old and tattered *gho* had replaced the expensive one he had made for the occasion. Furious, he put on the old *gho* as he slipped out of the tub, determined to find the culprit and punish him.

Suddenly, the farmer's wife, who saw only the tattered *gho* and not who was in it, screamed loudly, 'Who are you? What are you doing here?'

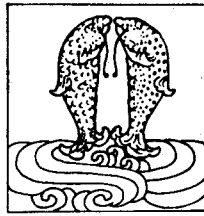
There were cries of, 'Thief! Thief!' and the servants and the guests, not recognizing the hapless groom, chased him out of the house.

Once all the excitement was over, Gele Gyalwa Dupchu, who had artfully exchanged his old *gho* for the groom's appeared and took his place by the side of his radiant bride.

No one, with the exception of Buthi's parents, was aware of the deception. As for the members of the wealthy farmer's retinue, they were far too drunk to notice that Gele Gyalwa Dupchu, not their master, was the groom.

So the wedding took place. And Buthi's father and mother were pleased, for Gele Gyalwa Dupchu had already proved that he would make a fine son-in-law and a good husband. Moreover, had not the wise old seer predicted that their beloved daughter was destined to wed the poor shepherd?

# The Curse on the Dzong



In the middle of the 19th century, there lived a pious old lama, Shabdrung Tuelku Jigme Norbu, who was the spiritual ruler and supreme head of the State. He spent much of his time in prayer and meditation. The day to day administration, revenues and military affairs were looked after by his deputy, Deb Dorji Namgyal, the temporal ruler.

Both Shabdrung Tuelku Jigme Norbu and Deb Dorji Namgyal resided in the Punakha Dzong, the State capital, each of them attending to the spiritual and secular matters of the State. In the course of time, Shabdrung Tuelku Jigme Norbu retreated deeper and deeper into spiritual seclusion, while Deb Dorji Namgyal assumed greater authority and power. It was but natural that the Deb came to be considered the most powerful person in the land.

Deb Dorji Namgyal was a wise and benevolent ruler, but he had one weakness: he delighted in playing pranks on his subjects. The pranks, though harmless enough, often annoyed those who were ridiculed, whereas others ignored what they considered juvenile eccentricity.

Once the Deb was in a particularly mischievous mood. He summoned his favourite attendant, Agaye Hap. Now, Agaye Hap came from the mountainous Valley of Ha, lying in the extreme west of Druk Yul. The people of Ha were tall, powerfully built, and well known for their valour, their skill in archery, and success in contests of strength and physical endurance. Agaye Hap was no exception, he was strong and courageous, and his name soon became a byword for these qualities among the people of Punakha. He was, at the same time, gentle and kind, honest and loyal, and, above all, he was devoted to his spiritual master, Shabdrung Tuelku Jigme Norbu.

Entering the spacious hall of the Punakha Dzong, Agaye Hap bowed low and awaited the Deb's pleasure.

'Agaye Hap,' cried Deb Dorji Namgyal, 'don't bow before me. You know that I've always held you in high esteem.'

'Sire . . .' protested Agaye Hap, vainly attempting to gauge his master's mood.

'Let me continue,' said the Deb, raising his hand. 'I consider that your services



are wasted here in the Punakha Dzong. I intend appointing you the Penlop of Paro. You are to proceed immediately to Paro, and take over as the Governor of Western Druk Yul.'

Deb Dorji Namgyal looked around, awaiting applause. Amidst the laughter from the courtiers, no one noticed Agaye Hap making a quiet exit.

That night, his mind in a turmoil, Agaye Hap pondered over the incredible incident. He had never been made the butt of the Deb's jests before; but he was shrewd enough not to lose a golden opportunity such as this. To be the Governor of Paro Dzong, a mighty fortress that dominated the whole fertile valley of the Paro Chhu! It was unbelievable that he, an illiterate peasant from the mountains could be chosen to hold such an important political position. No wonder the courtiers had laughed. Nevertheless, they had been witness to this seemingly mock proclamation. Who could assert that Deb Dorji Namgyal was not in earnest? Wasn't he all-powerful?

So the next morning, before the first light of dawn, Agaye Hap found his way to Shabdrung Tuelku Jigme Norbu's apartment. That illustrious soul, too, had risen early and was about to begin his meditation. He showed no surprise at the appearance of Agaye Hap, whose occasional but unexpected visits were not unusual. Agaye Hap bowed low before his master and told him all that had taken place. Shabdrung Tuelku was amazed.

'You mean he has actually appointed you Paro Penlop?'

'Yes, Your Holiness,' Deb Dorji Namgyal said, 'I was to proceed to the Paro Valley and take charge of my duties as Governor at the Paro Dzong.'

'It's amazing that he should have taken such a step, but at the same time it's not unbelievable, because he has always been very fond of you.'

'If it pleases Your Holiness to approve of this appointment, I will proceed to Paro with your blessings,' said Agaye Hap, knowing fully well that the final sanction for such an appointment had to come from the spiritual ruler.

Shabdrung Tuelku Jigme Norbu, in full faith, performed the religious ceremonies required for solemnizing such an appointment, and presented Agaye Hap with a *khadhar*, a white ceremonial scarf, and blessed him, thereby acknowledging his suzerainty over the Paro Valley.

Agaye Hap became the powerful Penlop of Paro. However, when Deb Dorji Namgyal came to know what had happened, he was very angry indeed. He sent Agaye Hap an ultimatum that if he did not relinquish the fictitious office of Paro Penlop he, the Deb, would personally order the assassination of Shabdrung Tuelku Jigme Norbu. Agaye Hap ignored the threat. He did not believe that the Deb would actually harm the holy man.

As it happens, the Punakha Dzong lies at the *chhuzom-sa*, the confluence of two rivers, the Pho Chhu and the Mo Chhu, the male and the female rivers. It

was accessible only by an old pinewood bridge, which nobody was allowed to cross without the Deb's permission. Shabdrung, meanwhile, remained a virtual prisoner in the Punakha Dzong, as the Deb's soldiers guarded it night and day.

Agaye Hap, overcome with remorse, felt he was responsible for the confinement of his beloved master. He realized he would not be able to rescue him by force; he would have to plan an effective escape for him. Therefore, he gathered a large army and concealed the soldiers in the western hills of Punakha. He then disguised himself in rags and covered his face with ashes, to look like a humble, devout peasant. Carrying a large *tsehou*, a basket, on his back, he approached the pine bridge. The soldiers on guard peered into the basket. Seeing it empty, they joked among themselves, while Agaye Hap crossed safely into the monastery. After some time he came out with Shabdrung Tuelku concealed inside the basket. None of the guards paid much attention to Hap. As he reached the far end of the bridge, he lowered the basket to rest his aching limbs, and laughed and joked with the guards. Trying to lift the basket, one of them remarked, 'You're a hefty-looking man; anyone would mistake you for Agaye Hap.'

The other soldiers laughed uproariously, but Shabdrung Tuelku, inside the basket, was so agitated that he began to tremble with fear and almost overturned the basket!

'What do you have in that *tsehou*?' asked one of the guards suspiciously.

'Only a dog! He is ill, and I am afraid he may turn mad!' came the quick reply from Agaye Hap.

'Get away from here, you wretched fellow. We don't want any mad dogs inside the Dzong,' shouted the guard furiously.

Agaye Hap picked up the basket and ran till he reached the western hills and was safe once again among his own soldiers. Pursuit was inevitable, but Shabdrung Tuelku Jigme Norbu and his faithful followers were able to dodge their pursuers. After many days of continuous marching, Shabdrung and his retinue reached Tibet. The faithful Agaye Hap remained with his master, and served him well.

Time passed.

One morning, Agaye Hap noticed that Shabdrung Tuelku was making a model on the table with the cooked rice from a *bangchu*.

'Agaye Hap, what does this look like?' he asked.

'Why,' came the reply, 'isn't it our Punakha Dzong?'

'Yes, it is,' said Shabdrung. 'I was humiliated and insulted by my own people. I must prove that I'm not helpless, and they must suffer for their actions.'

Shabdrung Tuelku Jigme Norbu raised his bowl of tea to pour its contents over the rice model of the Dzong, when Agaye Hap fell down on his knees and implored him not to destroy the Punakha Dzong. However, Shabdrung Tuelku let a few drops of tea fall on one corner of it.



He laughed and joked with the guards.

'I'll have mercy on them, Hap, at your request, but they cannot go entirely unpunished.'

Soon after, it came to pass that there was a tremendous storm, the like of which had never been seen in the whole of Druk Yul. The rain came down in torrents; the wind uprooted trees; there were landslides and several people died. But the Punakha Dzong remained intact, except for a small corner of the building—the very corner where the tea had fallen on the rice model. A whisper ran through the valley that the flood was the curse of Shabdrung Tuelku Jigme Norbu who had been forced to leave the land of his birth.

The Punakha Dzong still stands at the *chhuzom-sa* of the Pho Chhu and the Mo Chhu. Much has changed; the old pinewood bridge has been replaced by a stronger bridge made of steel. The portion of the Dzong ruined by the flood has long since been repaired; but few people know that if it had not been for the entreaties of Agaye Hap, the entire Dzong would have been destroyed long ago.

Therefore, when a new palace was to be built for the young king, the two master-craftsmen, known for the perfection of their work, were engaged to build it.

The two craftsmen, each excellent in his own craft, feared that the other would surpass him and thereby win the favour of the young king. Though each was jealous of the other's ability, it was the artist who had a mean and malicious nature and he was determined to be rid of his rival. To achieve this, he reasoned, he would have to have the help of the king himself.

Remembering the rumour he had heard about the king's faith in his father's spiritual guidance, he sought admission to the palace. Ushered into the presence of His Royal Majesty, he bowed low and said, 'Sire, last night I dreamt of your father, the late king. In my dream he ordered me to go to *lhayul*, to heaven, to decorate his palace. I am but a poor artist, Your Majesty, I can only decorate it after it has been built, as your father knows. Here is the letter I found under my pillow when I woke up this morning.'

King Kuenchong was filled with awe when he read the letter, for he believed that his father planned to make his spiritual presence known through the master-artist. The letter clearly said that his father was happy, but had one desire and that was to have built for himself a palace which would be a replica of the one he had on earth. And that as Kungha, the carpenter, had built his palace on earth, he would be pleased if he were sent to *lhayul*.

The young king was delighted. He thought his father had indeed sent his first spiritual message. He immediately sent for Kungha, the master-carpenter. He showed him the late king's letter and told him that he should join his father in *lhayul* as soon as possible.

When the carpenter saw what the late king had to say, he guessed immediately that the idea was a creation of the artist Kungha's mind. He had no choice but to consent outwardly but asked how he should go.

The king replied that the artist would know as he had brought the letter.

So the artist was sent for and consulted. Pleased that his plan was working, he elaborated in great detail.

'The late king desires that Kungha, the carpenter, should join him in *lhayul* in order to build him a palace. First, a large quantity of dry wood will have to be collected. Next oil, which will burn easily, must be poured on the wood. The lamas will then begin the prayers and the carpenter, with the tools of his trade must sit on the very top of the wood-pile. When the wood is set on fire and the smoke begins to rise, the carpenter astride the smoke will ascend towards *lhayul*.'

The master-carpenter had no option but to agree. Openly refusing would seal his fate immediately. But he insisted that the wood be collected outside his house, and that he should be given a week to prepare for his departure.

His wife was horrified to learn what the artist had in store for her husband.

But the carpenter assured her that he was well-prepared and she need not worry. He spent the entire week building an underground passage beneath his house. Then he made a hole in the ground over the exact spot where the wood was to be placed, and connected it to the passage. Next he covered it over with planks and earth so that not a trace of the hole could be seen.

On the appointed day, a large crowd gathered. Everything had been arranged in accordance with the master-artist's instructions. The wood-pile was ready in front of the carpenter's house. Amidst the chanting of prayers and the beating of drums and cymbals, the carpenter, taking his tools with him, placed himself on the pile of wood. Cries of horror arose as the wood caught fire and the flames spread. As the smoke billowed into the air, the carpenter slipped through the hole in the ground and made his exit through the underground passage.

Meanwhile the artist, none the wiser, pointed towards the smoke shouting, 'There goes Kungha to *lhayul*!'

The crowd looked towards the sky; of course they could see nothing; yet they, too, shouted excitedly, 'Kungha has gone to build a palace for the old king!'

For one month the master-carpenter remained hidden inside his house. Every day he would bathe in cow's milk, and as he did not go out in the sun, his complexion turned very fair. When the month was drawing to a close, he asked his wife to make him a robe of white silk, such as heavenly beings wear.

Then a day before the month was to end, he composed a letter from the late king to his son. With the letter in hand he went to King Kuenchong's palace. There was great consternation when the carpenter appeared. The king and his ministers were wonder-struck at the miraculous change in the carpenter. Thinking that Kungha the carpenter had in reality returned from *lhayul*, the king took the letter and discussed its contents with his ministers.

'My father is very pleased with the master-carpenter who has built him a wonderful palace,' he said. 'His work is done, so he is sending him back with the request that he should be richly rewarded. As there is still work to be done, he requests that I send Kungha, the artist, so that he may use his talent in decorating the palace. He further suggests that the artist be sent to *lhayul* in the same manner as was the carpenter.'

The master-artist, when sent for, could scarcely believe what he saw; Kungha the carpenter, alive, fair, and dressed in a robe of silk! It was not possible that he had escaped the fire, yet he stood there in front of him with a taunting smile on his face. The artist knew he had been tricked, but for the life of him he could not understand how the carpenter had done it.

The artist grew pale when the king read out the letter the carpenter had given him. If he did not comply with the king's request he would be exposed for what he was. If he agreed he would surely die. Remembering what the carpenter had



'There goes Kungha to lhayul!'



'There goes Kungha to *lbayul*!'

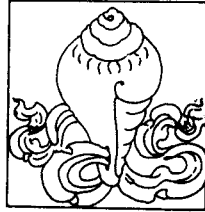


requested earlier, he asked for the required week to prepare for his departure. The week came to an end, but the sorrowful artist could find no solution.

The same arrangements were made as before. Only this time the wood was piled in front of the artist's house, and he was made to sit in the centre of it with his tools of trade. Then, before the wood was set alight, the king gave the artist his blessings, and instructed him to return when his work in *lhayul* was finished.

There was no escape for the master-artist in whose mind this idea had first originated. And as the flames rose around him, he died, not knowing of the underground passage that led to the carpenter's house, nor of the masterly manner in which the carpenter had outwitted him.

## How the Toad Got Its Warts



Once upon a time, in the southern forests, there dwelt an old man and his wife. It was spring, and before the rains set in, they had to clear the forest slopes around their small hut and prepare the ground for the planting of corn. Fighting the rapid advance of the forest was back-breaking work for the old couple. They had no one to help them. Each year they cleared and tilled the land, and each year, after the harvest, the forest reclaimed the land, advancing relentlessly and undoing the hard labour of the season before.

The old woman, clearing the underbrush alongside her husband, muttered to herself as she worked. The old man would occasionally nod, as a matter of habit. Being partially deaf there was little he understood, but it sufficed that he nodded. As they toiled, they would pause occasionally to rest, and it was during one of these brief intervals, that the old woman thought she heard a voice say, 'I'll snatch that axe and sickle from the old couple.'

At first she thought that she was dreaming, then looking around, she noticed a toad near the bole of a tree. It never occurred to the old woman to be surprised that the toad could talk. In those days animals and human beings could communicate with one another.

'Did you say something?' she enquired.

'I did,' replied the toad.

'What did you say?' asked the old woman.

'I said that I was going to snatch your axe and sickle.'

The old woman turned to her husband, 'Old man,' she shouted in his ear, 'that toad says he is going to snatch our axe and sickle.'

The old man did not hear what his wife had said, or perhaps he did not care to listen. He merely shook his head and went on with his work.

After a while, the toad croaked again and said, 'These two old people think I am joking. Watch the fun when I run off with their axe and sickle.'

At this the old woman paused and stared at the amphibious creature with its smooth grey-green skin, protruding eyes and squat ungainly body.

'Go away and leave us alone,' she shrieked. But the toad croaked and stared at

her with his large unblinking eyes. The old woman, in exasperation, turned to her husband.

'Did you hear what that toad just said?' she demanded. The old man ignored her and continued with his work.

By this time the old woman's patience was at an end. She moved some distance away from where the toad sat glaring at her near the bole of the tree.

She need not have moved. A few minutes later she heard the same voice, 'I'll snatch your axe and sickle if you're not careful.' She turned and discovered that the toad had followed her and was seated on a rock close to where she was working.

'Go away,' she cried, now thoroughly frightened. But the toad would not move.

'Husband,' she shouted, as she grabbed his arm and shook him, 'this toad keeps repeating that he is going to snatch our axe and sickle.'

The old man raised his head and stared at the toad. Having at last heard what his wife had said he grew alarmed.

'Come wife, let us go,' he cried. 'How can we work if this creature takes away our axe and sickle?'

The old couple scurried along the path through the forest. In their haste to get away from the toad, they did not notice a snake moving across the path. The old man, short-sighted as well as hard of hearing, stepped on the snake's tail as he ran; the old woman close on his heels, stepped on its back.

The snake, hurt that he had needlessly been stepped upon, lashed his tail in anger, 'Humans,' he said to himself, 'they think they own the forest!'

Angry with the world at large, the snake darted through the underbrush bent on destruction. When he saw a tailor-bird's nest hanging on a bush quite close to the ground, he poked his head into it. There lay three eggs.

'Serves the tailor-bird right for leaving her nest,' he thought as he ate all three. Satisfied with what he had done, he slipped quietly away into the forest.

Meanwhile, the tailor-bird, who had gone in search of her supper, returned, and found to her dismay that her eggs had disappeared. Dejected, she left her nest and flew deep into the forest. On and on she flew until she came across a hornbill perched on a tree. She paused to rest on the branch of the tree above the one on which he sat. The hornbill did not realize that the tailor-bird was perched above him until, suddenly her droppings fell upon his head.

Disgusted at the unseemly behaviour of the little bird, the hornbill left the branch on which he was sitting and flew down into the valley.

He stopped when he came to a tree which was laden with the *darmtse* or jackfruit. Giving vent to his anger he struck at the largest of the *darmtse* with his beak and then flew away.

As the *darmtse* fell from the branch on which it hung, a deer chanced to stop



The toad stared at her with his large unblinking eyes.

beneath the shade of the tree. The fruit fell with gigantic force on the deer's back. The deer, startled at the violence of the unexpected blow, dashed through the valley and did not stop to rest until it reached a field where some jungle fowl were feasting on grain left over from the harvest. The deer, still smarting from the blow, pranced and jumped, kicking his hind legs high into the air. The jungle fowl in alarm flew in all directions.

Furious with the deer for having interrupted their feast, they went to report the matter to the king. As they neared the palace, they discovered that the king's grain, after a rich harvest, had been spread out to dry on the ground outside the palace walls. The jungle fowl forgot the mission on which they had originally set out, and unable to resist the temptation they began to eat the grain. They were in the midst of a royal feast when one of the palace guards happened to pass by.

'What are you doing with the royal grain?' he yelled. 'I shall report this matter to the king.'

The king sent the palace guard back to fetch the jungle fowl and asked them why they had raided his grain.

'If it please Your Majesty,' said one of the jungle fowl, 'we were on our way to the palace to report the deer who had frightened us. When we saw the grain drying in the sun, the temptation was so great, we could not resist stopping to eat some.'

The king decided to send for the deer. The king's soldiers searched the forest and finally found the deer resting in the shade of the same *darmtse* tree from which the fruit had fallen.

'Why did you disturb the jungle fowl?' asked the king when the deer was brought before him.

'Your Majesty,' replied the deer, 'I stopped to rest under the shade of a tree when a *darmtse* fell with great force on my back, and hurt me. So I ran and did not stop until I came across the jungle fowl.'

The *darmtse* fruit must be sent for, decided the king. The soldiers of the palace were sent into the valley and they searched and searched until they came to the tree under which the deer had rested. On the ground beneath the tree lay the *darmtse*.

In the presence of the king, the *darmtse* said: 'I did not mean to hurt the deer, Your Majesty. If the hornbill had not struck me so violently with his beak, I would not have fallen from the tree.'

This time the king sent his soldiers in search of the hornbill. The hornbill was eventually discovered deep in the forest, and reluctantly he went before the king. When asked why he had hit the fruit, he replied, 'I was resting under a tree, Your Majesty, when a tailor-bird came and splattered its droppings all over me. That is the reason why I attacked the fruit on the tree.'

The king was determined to get to the truth of the matter so he sent for the tailor-bird. Now, the tailor-bird had built herself a new nest in the forest, and it was some

time before she could be found. When the tailor-bird arrived at the palace the king asked her why she had insulted the hornbill by splattering it with her droppings.

'Your Majesty,' came the reply, 'I did not intend to insult the hornbill. I was upset because a snake had eaten all the eggs I had laid.'

So the search for the snake began. Now snakes are difficult creatures to find in the forest because in the day-time they hide themselves amongst rocks and in crevices; in holes in the ground; and even coil themselves round the branches of trees. Therefore it was some time before the snake that had eaten the tailor-bird's eggs could be found and brought before the king.

'I was hurt and angry, Your Majesty, when the old man and his wife stepped on me,' said the snake when he was questioned, 'and that is why I ate the tailor-bird's eggs.'

There remained only the old man and his wife to be questioned, or so thought the king when he sent for the old couple. But when they appeared in fear and trembling, before the king, and were questioned as to why they had stepped on the snake, the old woman replied, 'We did not see the snake, Your Majesty, we were running away from the toad who had threatened to snatch our axe and sickle.'

'So the toad is at the bottom of all the trouble,' thought the king. 'Let us send for him and see what he has to say.'

The toad when he was sent for had, strangely enough, nothing to say.

'Why,' persisted the king, 'why did you threaten to take the axe and sickle belonging to this old man and woman?'

'I was only out to tease them, Your Majesty,' came the sheepish reply. 'I did not think they would take me seriously.'

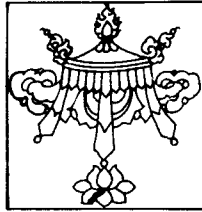
The king pondered over the matter for a long time. He decided to teach the toad a lesson.

'I shall punish you so that you and all the other animals in the forest will remember to be thoughtful and considerate in future,' said the king. 'Did you not think of the harm you were doing by teasing the old man and the old woman? You frightened the old couple thoughtlessly, they hurt the snake, the snake ate the tailor-bird's eggs, and the tailor-bird upset the hornbill. Because the hornbill was upset, the deer got hurt, and then he disturbed the jungle fowl. Think of the untold damage you have done.'

He sent one of his courtiers into the royal kitchen and ordered that a well-heated flat iron be brought to him. This, he thrust on the toad's back. In an instant, thousands of wart-like blisters appeared all over his back as the skin sizzled and burned. The toad howled in pain and hopped out of the palace, and hopped and hopped away into the forest, howling as he went. He was never seen again.

That is the reason why, the animals of the forest say, the toad has a wart-covered skin even to this day.

# The Dragon of Lunana



Once, a long long time ago, there lived a dragon in the northern regions of Lho Mon.

Dragons, it is said, are averse to cold, but where this dragon hibernated in the winter nobody knew. In summer he roamed the mountain wilderness north of the Valley of Lunana, where the sound of his mighty roar, accompanied by smoke and fire, was heard.

The villagers of Thanza believed that their dragon was a friendly one. There was no report of anyone ever having disappeared or of cattle being lifted at any time. Since the dragon did not trouble the villagers, they saw no reason to disturb him.

One day, when the snows had begun to melt on the mountains, a stranger from Laya, a valley to the west of Lunana, came to the village. He carried a pack on his back such as travellers do, and he was also armed with a bow and some arrows.

A stranger, especially one who was a *sharop*, a hunter, was most unwelcome in the peaceful village of Thanza. More so when it was known that he had come in search of the dragon.

The stranger was perplexed to find the villagers so inhospitable. He had never met such a reception in any other village.

Lam Tsangpa, the oldest and most venerated inhabitant of Thanza was the only one to approach him.

‘What dragon?’ he asked when questioned by the hunter. And his wrinkled old eyes widened in mock disbelief. ‘We have heard of no such beast here. It must be the dragon of Me La of which you speak.’ He continued telling his *mani*-beads and fervently hoped that the stranger would go farther east in search of the dragon and leave the villagers in peace.

But the *sharop* was not to be so easily deceived. He was determined to continue his quest for the dragon of Lunana. So, contrary to the old man’s advice, he went northwards. The path he followed led through low mountain passes where countless prayer flags stirred gently in the wind as he passed, spreading their universal blessings for the benefit of mankind.

The vegetation grew more and more sparse as the hunter continued his journey. Now and again he caught an occasional glimpse of the snow-capped mountain, Kangphu Kang, in the distance; below it, a no-man's-land of barren mountain wilderness. That was where, it was said, the dragon had been seen.

At nightfall the hunter stopped to rest on a ridge in the shelter of a large rock. From his pack he took some strips of dried yak meat and yak cheese which he ate hungrily. He washed this down with some *chhang* from a bamboo bottle.

It was dark except for occasional glimpses of a waning moon, partially hidden by clouds. Suddenly, there was a thunderous roar. Startled, the *sharop* looked towards the desolate mountain. The roar came again and with it flashes of fire which brightened the night sky. In great excitement he struggled to his feet and stumbled in the direction from which the sound came. He tripped unexpectedly over uneven ground and found himself hurtling through space. Down, down, down he fell until he hit the bottom.

The ground beneath him began to tremble and he heard a sound like the first low rumblings of thunder. Then, for a moment, his heart stood still. And he knew without a doubt that, by some trick of fate, he had landed right on top of the dragon!

How ironic, he thought. There they were, the hunter and the hunted, trapped together in a pit of darkness.

Overcoming his fear, he ran his hands gently over the rough scaly body, careful not to awaken the sleeping beast. Then slowly he worked his way across its broad back, and lowered himself until his feet touched the ground. Next, he groped his way inch by inch until he came up against the rough surface of a wall; there he crouched and waited for daybreak.

As soon as the first light of dawn penetrated the darkness, the hunter looked around him. He found he was in a deep ravine; its perpendicular sides tapered towards the top to form a narrow opening, through which he had fallen the night before. And there at the bottom of the ravine lay the colossal dragon, fast asleep.

The unfortunate man soon realized there was no escape. Both exits to the ravine were blocked with fallen debris. Moreover, he was unarmed for he had lost his bow and arrows.

Under the circumstances there was little he could do but wait. He desperately wondered when the dragon had last satisfied his hunger. If he was hungry when he awoke he would most certainly devour him in a single mouthful! The idea was not very appealing!

So he watched helplessly and waited. After some time the dragon stirred. Then he gave a roar which echoed from the walls of the ravine. To the hunter's great surprise he turned his massive head and gave him a doleful glance. And to his utter astonishment the dragon lifted his front claw in which he held a *norbu*, a



jewel, and licked the precious gem a few times. This appeared to satisfy him, and he went to sleep again.

The *sharop* was amazed. From all accounts the dragon should have killed and eaten him by now. Instead, he had given the hunter a look full of misery, licked the *norbu* a few times and slept.

There had to be some sort of magic to the gem, thought the man. Perhaps its magical powers could help him to escape. He waited for a while, then crept as close as he could to the claw that held the jewel. At that very moment the dragon opened one sleepy eye, gave the hunter a most sorrowful glance and dropped off to sleep.

The hunter retreated once more to the far end of the ravine and bided his time. As he waited, he thought of his one great desire, to kill the dragon of Lunana, and be acknowledged the hero of Laya.

At daybreak, stiff, hungry but no longer afraid, he went close to the dragon and taking a deep breath he passed his tongue over the smooth surface of the precious gem, as the beast had done.

But nothing happened. The jewel was as cold and as impersonal as any precious stone could be.

Once more he licked the jewel, with the same result. The hunter thought it very strange that the dragon alone should react to the touch of the gem. So he tried once again. Then a strange thing happened; quite suddenly he felt as though he had had a full and satisfying meal. Above all, he felt calm and at peace with the world.

That, then was the secret of the *norbu*!

Soon after, the *sharop* went to sleep and whenever he awoke and felt the pangs of hunger, he passed his tongue over the smooth surface of the jewel. The dragon occasionally awoke and did the same.

The man and the beast continued in this manner for some time. Then, one day, the hunter decided he would wrest the charmed jewel from out of the dragon's claw. He eased it gently from the sleeping dragon's grasp, but no sooner was it in his hand than there was a tremendous explosion! The earth trembled violently and the walls of the ravine began to cave in. The terrified *sharop*, with the gem clasped tightly in his hand, climbed on to the dragon's back and grabbed his tail.

Another explosion followed, and the dragon was thrown bodily out of the ravine. The hunter, who was perched precariously on his back, loosened his hold and fell to the ground.

Meanwhile, the dragon continued to ascend higher and higher into the clouds until he finally disappeared from sight.

When the *sharop* returned to Laya and narrated the incredible tale of the

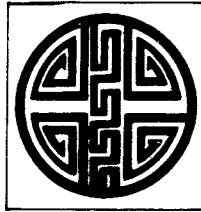


No sooner was it in his hand than there was a tremendous explosion!

dragon of Lunana, no one believed him. And when he showed them the *norbu* and tried to prove that it possessed magical powers, nothing happened! The power of the jewel had vanished with the dragon.

As for the villagers of Thanza, they still believed that their dragon existed. But when they no longer heard his mighty roar in the valley, they, too, forgot him. There remained only a few of the old inhabitants who continued to narrate the story to their children and their children's children, and in time the Dragon of Lunana became a legend.

# The Lake that Ran Away



In eastern Bhutan, the river Kuru Chhu flows down the mountain separating the villages of Chali and Tshamang, which stand on either bank.

Chali, a far more prosperous village than Tshamang, was said to be favoured by the gods because it had a small lake which provided the village with fresh water the whole year round. The water of the lake was sweet and clear. And the villagers credited their good fortune to the snakes, the guardians of the lake, whom they regarded as their benefactors. Therefore, they did not desecrate its purity, and used only the water which they required for their daily needs.

The Kuru Chhu, which separated the two villages, cascaded down the mountain into the valley, spreading in its wake a litter of twigs and branches of trees, earth and stones. When it rained the river turned a muddy brown and roared even more tumultuously down the mountain path, with an echo which resounded from the snow-clad mountains above.

The inhabitants of both villages bathed and washed their clothes on their own side of the river and, on occasion, even herded their cattle into its murky waters. As for the Tshamang villagers, having no lake of their own, they had no option but to drink the river water. They resented the fact that they were denied Chali's good fortune. More so when, on a clear night, they would sometimes see *karmi*, sacred lights, shining on the lake across the river. These shining lights illumined the entire lake with their brilliance and were visible for miles around.

Each year the resentment of the villagers of Tshamang grew, until, one day, they decided to defile the waters of the Chali lake. So, on a dark night, some of the more daring inhabitants of Tshamang filled a large *tsebou*, a basket, with the refuse of the village and furtively moved into Chali. And while the village slept, they emptied the refuse into the lake.

Now the serpents, the guardians of the lake, furious at this deliberate sacrilege, decided to abandon the lake. The hour was late, but rather than stay in its polluted waters, they decided to seek shelter for the night in one of the houses of the village. They chose a solitary house on a hill not far from the lake. It belonged to an old farmer and his wife.

One of the serpents, taking the form of an old woman, went to the farmhouse. The old couple welcomed her, and after they had given her some warm milk to drink, showed her to a room where she could rest.

That night, the farmer was awakened by strange noises and the subdued mutter of human voices coming from the room where the old woman slept. Curious, he crept silently towards the room and peeped through a chink in the door.

He saw to his horror that the room was full of serpents—long, black, shimmering bodies, lighting up the room as they slithered over the floor. Some of the serpents lay coiled, as if asleep, while others moved restlessly, swaying and thrashing their tails around furiously. Although their voices remained low, they appeared to be highly agitated.

The old farmer hurried back to tell his wife of the strange and terrifying scene he had witnessed.

'Serpents! Here?' cried the old woman in amazement. 'What were they saying?'

'I could not make out what they were saying,' he replied, 'their voices were indistinct. But they appeared to be very angry.'

'They must be the guardians of the lake,' the old man continued. 'I wonder why they are here at this hour of the night. Something must have happened to disturb them.'

'In the morning we must try to appease them,' said his wife. 'They have never been known to leave the lake before.'

The next morning, as the old couple approached the room occupied by the serpents, the farmer noticed that the sound of voices had ceased. Cautiously he pushed open the door and discovered that the room was empty! There was nothing to indicate there had been anything or anyone in the room the night before.

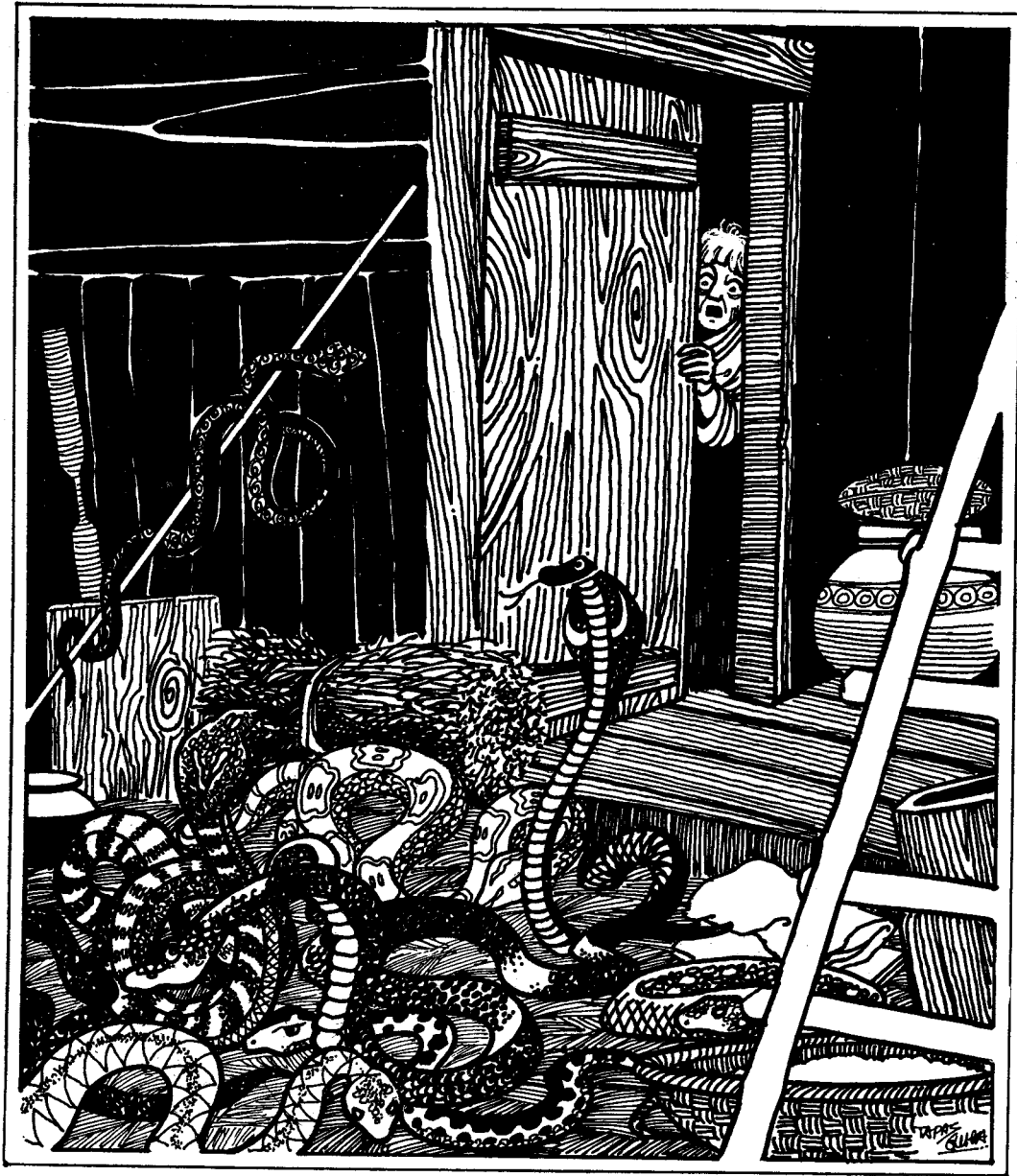
But there, in the centre of the room, on the floor, lay a miniature *chhorten*, a stupa, made of gold.

'They must have left this gift for us,' exclaimed the old man excitedly, 'it is obvious they are not angry with us.'

The old woman, who was blessed with the gift of second-sight, cried, 'Oh, they are indeed angry! Perhaps not with us. But something has annoyed them. Do you not see that the tip of the *chhorten* is broken?'

'If they were not angry,' she muttered to herself, 'they would not have left behind a broken *chhorten*.'

'No one must know that the guardians of the lake spent the night in our house,' she cautioned, 'and no one must ever know that they left us this valuable gift.'



He saw to his horror that the room was full of serpents.

That very morning, the villagers of Chali were dismayed to find that their lake had disappeared during the night; dry, hollow land was all that remained as proof that it had once existed.

As time passed the fortunes of the Chali villagers slowly dwindled, and soon they were no better off than the neighbouring Tshamang.

The old farmer and his wife died, carrying their secret with them. No sooner had they died than their house, where the serpents had spent the night, mysteriously caught fire and was burnt to the ground.

The golden *chhorten* disappeared along with the house.

Nevertheless, when the house was being rebuilt, a golden nugget was found amongst the ashes. The new owner, marvelling at his good fortune, kept the nugget. He did not disclose his find to anyone. But once the house was built, he and his family did not remain in it for long. One disaster followed another, and once again the house lay vacant.

Then a strange thing happened, the land surrounding the house became wet and marshy, and stagnant pools of water remained standing there even when the season was dry.

The villagers of Tshamang, their enmity long forgotten, remained forever in awe of Chali, for on a clear night, some would tell of a phenomenal sight: of *karmi* lighting the pools of water that surrounded the empty house.

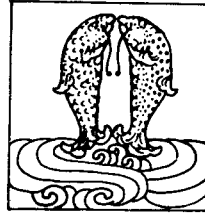
Years later, a traveller from Kheng Buli, a village in the northernmost part of eastern Bhutan, stopped to break journey at Chali. He spoke of a lake that had suddenly appeared in Kheng Buli. The lake, he said, had, since then, twice made an attempt to run away, but its passage had been barred by the protective gods of their village.

The house on the hill stands to this day, lonely and desolate; and the land where the lake had once been remains dry. Some say that there is a curse on Chali. But the people of Chali still believe that the guardians of the lake will return one day.

*For hadn't the lake already tried twice to run away?*

The Chali villagers believe that the serpents will stop first at the house on the hill where *karmi* will guide them, before they take up their abode at the original site which will become a lake once again.

## Dawa Drives Away the Demons



There was once a poor widow who had two sons. They were both tall, strong, handsome young men; unfortunately, they were exceedingly dim-witted. The elder son, Gawa, by virtue of his age, was considered to be the smarter of the two. Dawa, the younger son, was content to be the buffoon. Therefore, he managed to get away with less work, and no responsibility.

The mother was deeply concerned about her two sons. She knew that without her guidance they were incapable of managing their small farm.

One day, the poor widow was taken seriously ill, and she realized that she had not long to live. Last-minute instructions had to be given to her sons, so she called out to them. But by the time they reached her side, she was too exhausted to speak. Feebly she cried, 'When . . . the *thithigem* . . . calls . . . plant *memja*, barley . . . when . . . the *khuju* . . . calls . . . plant *gyeza*, corn.'

And she died.

Day after day, the two young men waited patiently for the call of the *thithigem*, or the *khuju*. But they did not hear the call of either bird. So they got tired of waiting and began to feast upon the food their mother had stored for the winter.

Summer passed into autumn, then winter, and still the birds did not call. The two brothers idled away their time; the fields lay fallow and the farmhouse fell into a state of neglect.

Then, one morning, to their astonishment and delight, they heard, loud and clear, the call of a bird.

'Do you hear the *thithigem* call?' shouted Dawa excitedly. 'It is time to plant the *memja*.'

'That is the *khuju* I hear,' replied Gawa. 'Now is the time to plant *gyeza*.'

A heated argument followed.

'Thithigem!' 'Khuju!' 'Thithigem!' 'Khuju!' 'Thithigem! Thithigem!' 'Khuju! Khuju!'

'All right,' Gawa raised his hands in protest. 'Let us not quarrel. What difference does it make which bird it is! We can plant both *memja* and *gyeza*.'

Dawa nodded in agreement. 'First, we must plough the fields, but we have no oxen.'





He missed the bee and gave the ox a mighty blow!

'We can borrow farmer Gyaltshe's oxen,' replied his brother.

So the two brothers set off for the neighbouring farm and borrowed the oxen. The farmer may have wondered at the absurdity of ploughing in the dead of winter, but he refrained from questioning them.

Once they were back on the farm, Gawa began ploughing the field, while Dawa sat and watched. When the sun was overhead, the elder brother called, 'Dawa, I will see to the oxen. You can go home and prepare the midday meal. Take good care not to spoil the food.'

Dawa obediently started back to the farmhouse; as he walked along the path he almost stepped into a mound of dung which lay on the ground.

'Hey, dung,' he scolded, 'be sure you are out of my way when I return.'

When the meal was ready, Dawa placed it in a *bangchu*, which he covered with a clean white cloth. On the way back to the field, he discovered, to his annoyance, that the dung still lay in the middle of the path.

'I thought I told you to get out of my way,' shouted the angry young man. Saying this, he picked up a large stone and threw it right into the centre of the dung heap. Naturally, the dung splattered all over the place: on the path, on Dawa, and it soiled the clean white cloth that covered the *bangchu*.

Gawa was furious when he saw the state of the cloth with which the food was covered.

'You are a stupid, useless oaf,' he yelled. 'Do you expect me to eat the food after this? You watch the oxen, while I get something to eat.'

So Dawa set himself to the task of watching the oxen. Just then a big bumble bee began buzzing overhead. It circled round and round, then landed on the back of one of the oxen, and gave it a sharp sting. The ox snorted, bucked and tried to get the bee off its back. But the bee held on.

Dawa immediately picked up a log and tried vainly to aim at the bee, instead he hit the ox. The ox bellowed loudly and ran wildly across the fields, past the farmhouse and down towards the river.

Meanwhile, the bee had landed on the rump of the second ox, and, in like manner, it gave the second ox a vicious sting. The ox bellowed, and Dawa raised the log once more; he missed the bee and gave the ox a mighty blow on its rump. The ox, maddened with pain, went careering down the path.

A bewildered Gawa returned to find that both the oxen had vanished.

'Where are the oxen?' he asked.

Dawa explained most sorrowfully what had happened. Gawa was furious.

'What do we say to farmer Gyaltshe?' he wanted to know. 'How do we pay him for the oxen?'

Dawa was silent.

'It is your fault that the oxen have run away, so you can take the blame. I'm

going away.' Gawa returned to the farmhouse, while Dawa followed sheepishly at a safe distance.

Silently, Gawa put all his clothes into a large *tsehou*, a basket. Then he went to the loft to pack some provisions for his journey.

Dawa had no intention of letting his brother leave without him. So he emptied the *tsehou*, hid its contents on the roof of the house, and climbed inside. Then he lowered the cover over his head.

Gawa left the farmhouse with the *tsehou* strapped to his back. After some time he was tired, so he put the *tsehou* down, and rested. 'If I had not packed this myself,' he thought, 'I would have accused Dawa of putting rocks in it.'

All this while, Dawa who wanted desperately to relieve himself, began to wriggle inside the *tsehou*, until it suddenly overturned and the lid fell off.

The astonished Gawa stared open-mouthed at the sight of his younger brother. Then he roared with laughter. Dawa smiled hesitantly, then he, too, joined in the laughter. They laughed and laughed until the tears ran down their cheeks.

'Now what do we do?' asked Gawa, wiping the tears from his eyes.

'Let us walk until sunset,' suggested Dawa, 'then stop at the first house we see.'

'That's a bright idea,' agreed the elder brother.

They walked on and on until the sun began to set. Then, when they had given up all hope of finding a place to spend the night, they discovered an old abandoned house standing in a field.

'It looks empty. There's no one about that I can see.'

'Good, we can stay the night here,' sighed Gawa with relief.

The door of the house was open, so they entered. There was still sufficient daylight for them to see that they were in a large empty room, in the corner of which there was a ladder. The ladder led to the room above.

The brothers threw themselves down on the floor, both completely exhausted.

'Gawa, look, there's something hanging from the ceiling!'

'Will you keep quiet, and let me sleep.'

'Gawa, it's frightening! There are so many of them.'

Gawa opened his eyes. And sure enough, from the slits between the boards in the ceiling, hung a number of long, thick, hairy ropes like tails.

Dawa sprang up and took hold of the largest in both hands and pulled. He pulled and pulled and suddenly it came down upon his head. At that same instant, there was a tremendous yell from the floor above, and the house vibrated with the sound of stamping feet.

'Quick, get behind the *ækhu*,' whispered Gawa. And the two frightened young men took refuge behind the ladder.

Dark, obscure figures came tumbling down from the floor above. Then, pushing, yelling and screaming they ran through the door and out of the house.

'What are they?' croaked the petrified Dawa.

'I think they are demons,' his brother replied.

'Gawa, let's get out of here!'

'No, we'll wait until morning. They won't bother us tonight,' Gawa assured him. 'Did you notice how frightened they were?'

An eerie silence descended on the house, as the two brothers, unable to sleep, waited for the dawn to break.

As soon as it was light, they clambered up the ladder and were dazzled at the sight that met their eyes. The walls of the room were studded with precious stones, and gold and silver coins lay scattered on the bare wooden floor.

The two young men could scarcely believe their good fortune. They soon became so absorbed examining the treasure they had found that they forgot all about the demons.

When it grew suddenly dark, Dawa exclaimed, 'Gawa, do you suppose the demons will return tonight?'

'I'd forgotten about them,' cried his elder brother. 'Let us get out of here before they come.'

No sooner had Gawa spoken than the tramp of feet could be heard in the distance. They rushed down the steps and out of the house. They looked around for a likely hiding place. An old hollow log lay close by, so they crept into it.

The yelling and the tramping of feet grew louder as the demons drew near. Then they began muttering and screeching as they jostled one another in their hurry to enter the house.

'Gawa . . .'

'Shush!'

'Gawa, *chhen gangchi!*' he groaned as he clutched his stomach.

'Quiet!'

But the unfortunate Dawa could not be quiet. He broke wind, and the explosion was so tremendous that the log burst.

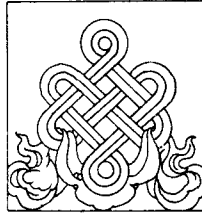
Gawa and Dawa stared with amazement as the demons, yelling and screaming, bounded out of the house, and into the darkness.

'Do you think they will come back?' asked the younger brother somewhat shaken.

'No,' Gawa assured him. 'This time they were really frightened!'

The demons never returned to the abandoned house; nor did anyone ever claim the treasure. So the brothers lived there well contented. If, at times, it seemed that the younger brother had assumed more importance, it was not surprising. As Gawa pointed out, they owed their good fortune to Dawa, for it was he who had eventually driven away the demons.

# Gasa Lama Singye



Once, long long ago, in the village of Changyul, near the river, Mo Chhu, there lived a peasant girl. Her name was Galem. She was the most beautiful girl in the land. Her voice was pure and true, even more glorious than the low sweet call of the nightingale.

Perhaps, the story of Galem would have turned out differently if fate had not decreed that she should meet and fall in love with the handsome *chhangap*, Singye, a servant of the powerful Deb Lhazang Gyaltsen, of the Punakha Dzong.

One morning, it happened that the lovely Galem left Changyul, dressed in an exquisite *kira* which had taken her six laborious months to make on her household loom. It was intricately woven in brilliant colours of red, blue, green and yellow. In search of a piece of matching silk for the lining of her *teogbo*, her jacket, she riffled among the fabrics offered by the traders who, on occasion, assembled outside the Punakha Dzong. The money her father had given her lay securely concealed just above the *kaira*, the belt, within the upper folds of her new *kira*.

It was a bright sunny day, and as Galem tripped gaily amongst the traders, pausing occasionally to feel the texture of each material which eager hands held out to her, she was suddenly conscious of a pair of eyes that followed her every move.

‘The green is the best choice,’ said a deep, rich voice from beside her.

Galem started as she was about to stretch out her hand for the bright sea-green silk which a trader was pressing her to take. She looked up into the amused but admiring eyes of the handsome young man who was staring at her.

‘The green?’

‘Hmm,’ he replied, ‘green is the predominant colour in your *kira*.’

‘What do you men know of colours or *kiras*,’ she said teasingly.

They both laughed. It was inevitable that they should fall in love, which they did.

The days that followed brought joy and richness into their lives. In the evenings as they strolled by the Mo Chhu, they laughed and talked with the ease

of having known and loved one another a lifetime. They spoke, she of her sheltered life in the village of Changyul, and he of his life in the Dzong. Occasionally, to his delight, she would sing. She had the loveliest voice Singye had ever heard. Sometimes they would talk of their plans for the future, but time had no meaning for the lovers as they walked, hand in hand, by the river's edge.

But, once again fate intervened.

One day, Penpa Tashi, a mean and crafty *chhangap*, a servant from the Punakha Dzong, who had recently fallen out of favour with the powerful Deb, came by chance upon the lovers as they walked along the bank of the river. So engrossed were they in each other that they were unaware of his presence. It may have been to their advantage if they had noticed him; for the crafty *chhangap* had been slighted once too often by the handsome Singye, so he seized the opportunity of having his revenge.

The wily Penpa Tashi knew from experience that it did not take long to spread a rumour. But he also realized that, by doing so, he could bring the young lovers closer together. If, on the other hand, he circulated disparaging remarks about Singye, it would carry no weight. Young Singye was in the enviable position of being Deb Lhazang Gyaltsen's favourite attendant. He worked hard, was obedient and loyal, and was implicitly trustworthy. Therefore, the only recourse left for Penpa Tashi was to make certain that Galem of Changyul was taken away from her lover. And that, too, with the unwitting connivance of the Deb himself.

So the malicious Penpa Tashi set the wheels in motion.

First, he convinced ten or twelve of his fellow *chhangaps* at the Dzong that Galem of Changyul was the loveliest girl in the whole valley. A simple enough task, since he had only to tell the truth. Those who had not seen Galem, soon came to believe that they had. In turn, they spread the word of Galem's extraordinary beauty to other *chhangaps*. And soon everyone in the Dzong spoke of the beautiful, ethereal Galem with the exquisite voice. And these senior counsellors, closest to the Deb, made certain that the words were whispered in his ear.

Now Deb Lhazang Gyaltsen had remained unmarried all these years. So far, no one had been able to convince him that there was a single maiden in the whole country who would make him a suitable *theum*, a queen. He turned down all proposals. Finally, when he heard of the lovely Changyul Galem, and when each of his *chhangaps* agreed, without exception, that she was the most beautiful maid in the land, he decided to make her his wife.

It is unusual that tidings of such an important nature should spread within the Dzong and not reach the innocent ears of Singye. However, whether the news was kept from him deliberately or not, Singye did not learn that his beloved Galem had been chosen as the Deb's queen.

Meanwhile, the Deb, in consultation with astrologers, decided it was time to make his betrothal known. A *chhangap*, none other than Penpa Tashi, was selected to carry the message to the parents of Galem of Changyul. As he walked to the village that morning, Penpa Tashi took great delight at the thought of watching Galem's face as he made the announcement. To his intense disappointment Galem was not to be seen. He found her father and mother busy ploughing the fields.

'Deb Lhazang Gyaltshe,' he announced pompously, 'has chosen your daughter, Galem, to be his queen. The marriage will be solemnized on the fifteenth day of the following month.' And saying this he left.

The old couple were stunned at the astonishing announcement. It was unbelievable! They thought they were dreaming. Could it be a prank, they wondered. But this was a matter of grave importance, not something to be joked about. Was it possible that the Deb, a powerful ruler such as he, wished to marry their daughter, a mere peasant girl, when he could select his bride from the noblest families in the land? They could not wait to give Galem the incredible news.

When Galem returned home that evening, her mother could not contain herself for joy.

'Daughter,' she burst out excitedly, 'the Deb has selected you for his queen.'

Galem laughed, 'Mother, why would Deb Lhazang Gyaltshe wish to marry a mere peasant girl? She would never be accepted as his wife.'

Her father intervened, 'Your mother has not made herself clear. The Deb sent a messenger this morning expressing his desire to marry you, our daughter.'

Galem was silent, uncertain of what to say next. Then, with confidence, she replied, 'Father, I cannot marry the Deb, I've already promised myself to Singye. We love one another.'

Her father's violent reaction frightened Galem.

'Who is Singye?' he shouted, beside himself with rage.

'A *chhangap* at the Dzong,' she replied.

'A *chhangap*! You wish to marry a servant, when you have been chosen to be the Deb's wife! Such an honour has never been bestowed on a peasant family before,' he roared.

'Singye and I love one another,' cried the unfortunate girl as she burst into tears and ran from the room.

The head lama of the Gasa Dzong, in the meantime, had sent an urgent request to Deb Lhazang Gyaltshe to send him a young, trustworthy *chhangap* from Punakha, to be his own personal attendant. The Deb, though all-powerful, was guided in all matters by the advice of his senior counsellors. Therefore, he left the selection of the *chhangap* to them. Penpa Tashi, seizing the opportunity to be rid of Singye, slyly suggested that he be sent to Gasa. The counsellors, glad

to be rid of anyone who showed the slightest sign of gaining favour with the Deb, readily agreed.

Singye, unaware of the predicament of his beloved Galem, left immediately for Gasa, and took over the duties of personal attendant to Gasa Lam.

Days, weeks, months passed.

Galem remained a virtual prisoner in the farmhouse. Her father tried various means to persuade her to accept the Deb's marriage proposal. He tried to cajole her, but did not succeed. Then he taunted her by saying that Singye had deserted her and would never return to Punakha.

Galem, safe in the knowledge that Singye would not forsake her, felt that it was time to reveal her secret. At the first opportunity she broke the news to her mother.

'Mother, I am with child,' she cried. To her astonishment her mother burst into tears.

'Aren't you happy, Mother?' asked the bewildered girl in surprise.

'Quiet, child,' cried the unhappy woman, 'I do not know what your father will have to say about this!' Whereupon she left the room weeping softly.

It was not long before Galem came to know her father's reaction to the news, which under other circumstances would have delighted him. He dragged Galem by the hair out of the farmhouse. All the way to the Mo Chhu, he showered her with abuse. He beat her mercilessly, and kicked her.

'Father, have mercy!' cried the girl piteously.

'Mercy,' he cried, 'you deserve no mercy! The Deb has been patient all this while, accepting the excuses I gave for postponing this marriage. Do you think he will marry you now? You have brought shame on us, you thoughtless girl.'

He continued to beat her more furiously than ever, and finally bound her hand and foot to some rocks on the bank of the river.

There he left her to die.

Battered and bleeding, the poor, unfortunate girl lay where her unrelenting father had left her. Again and again her thoughts turned to her beloved. There was no way a message could reach him in Gasa. Suddenly, she saw a figure on the opposite bank of the river walking towards Gasa. She cried out in desperation, but her voice was lost in the wind.

Then in her glorious voice she began to sing.

'Stranger,' she sang, 'I am a prisoner here. Will you come to my aid?'

The stranger, who happened to be on his way to Goeonshari, stopped to listen. The tune was so beautiful, and the voice the most exquisite he had ever heard.

'If you are going to Gasa, stranger, will you take this message for me? Tell Lama Singye that I have been turned out of my home, and left here to die. Tell





Then in her glorious voice she began to sing.

him that he should come here today, if not today, then tomorrow.' She sang the song again and again until she heard him repeat the refrain.

The stranger found the tune so fetching, and the voice so enchanting that he continued to hum the tune as he went on his way.

\* \* \*

Singye, as it happened, was selected to participate in a *Chho-Dha*, an archery contest, the very day the stranger from Punakha arrived in Gasa. The competitors had assembled at the archery field when the stranger passed by. And as he walked past he hummed the melody of Galem's song.

Singye, the first of the contestants, stood rooted to the spot when he heard the familiar melody. It was the tune to which Galem had sung when they met on the bank of the river in Punakha.

'Stranger, wait!' he called. 'Tell me whom you seek, and where you heard this song.'

The stranger looked at the handsome young man who had accosted him, and accepted the *doma* he offered in greeting. 'I heard it in Punakha,' he replied. 'I could not see the singer clearly, for the voice came from across the river.' And he repeated the words Galem had sung. 'Will you see that Lama Singye receives the message?' he asked, as he prepared to return to Goeonshari.

'I am Singye of Gasa Lam,' and his heart filled with foreboding. His beloved Galem had sent for him. The message was clear. Perhaps even now it was too late. His request for leave was given with silent approval, for the tale of Singye's courtship had already reached the compassionate Gasa Lam.

Singye travelled as fast as he could through the rough mountains of Gasa, along the narrow footpaths that skirted them; down into the valleys and across the rivers. Only when he was half way to Punakha, did he pause to rest at a small *chhorten*, and there, to his astonishment, he met his beloved Galem. The lovely Galem had appeared in person to greet him. She was dressed in the exquisitely woven *kira* she had worn when they had first met. In her hands she carried a *bangchu* containing food, and some milk in a *zoh*, a bamboo container. They talked as they had often done by the river's edge. And Singye told her how his heart had filled with sorrow when he had received her message.

'We're together now,' she said gently. 'You must be hungry. See, I've brought you something to eat, and some milk.' They sat down by the *chhorten*, and she opened the *bangchu*. As Singye was about to eat, she stopped him.

'Make your offering to the Lord before you begin,' she said.

He took some rice in his hand, closed his eyes and raised the offering heavenward. When he turned to smile at her, he found that she had vanished.

Deeply distressed, Singye ran all the way to Punakha; he stopped only when

he reached the bridge to the Dzong. He could see that a crowd had assembled at the *death threul*, the cremation ground. His throat tightened and tears pricked his eyes. Could it be his beloved, he wondered.

'Stranger,' he asked of a man passing by. 'Who . . .?' his voice broke.

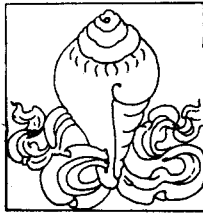
'Galem of Changyul,' replied the stranger, 'she has gone to *lhayul*.'

Singye knew then that he had arrived too late to save his beloved. And as he swooned, her glorious voice aroused him with a mournful song.

At the *death threul* the mourners made way for him, the *chhangaps*, friends and relatives; and her father and mother, who rebuked him silently with their eyes.

On the funeral pyre lay the prone body of Changyul Galem wrapped in a white shroud. With an anguished cry he flung himself on her still form. And the flames which, until then had not touched her, began to blaze furiously as they enveloped the lovers, uniting them forever.

## Moten Phago, the Soothsayer with the Pig's Head



Once in a village there lived an idle farmer and his shrewd and diligent wife. The wife worked hard and spent much time at home and in the fields. But the farmer was not only lazy but also stupid and was content to spend the day singing or dozing while his wife did all the work.

Year after year, the farmer and his wife grew poorer and poorer, and the harvest from their farm grew smaller and smaller until, one year, when there was insufficient rain and drought in the land, the farmer's wife could contain herself no longer.

'Husband!' she cried, 'We have no rice left. Soon we will have to sell the cow and the horse, the farm and all we possess. You can see that by my efforts alone we cannot survive. It is a husband's duty to go out into the world and find something to do.'

The farmer nodded in agreement, but the shrewd wife knew that words alone were not sufficient to goad her lazy husband into action. So that night, while her husband slept, she hatched her plan. Silently, in the early hours of dawn, she dressed and crept out of the house, taking with her the butter she had churned from the milk the day before. Some distance away, in a field where a band of nomads had pitched their tents, she placed the butter beneath a bush. Then she went back to bed.

The farmer, as was his custom, woke late and saw from his window, cats, dogs, cows and horses enjoying what appeared to be a sumptuous feast. He rushed down the stairs and out of the house, with his *gho* flapping loosely around him.

'Shoo, shoo!' he shouted as he clapped his hands at the startled animals. They scattered in all directions, and the astonished farmer found beneath the bush what was left of the butter. 'See, wife,' he cried as he rushed towards the field where his wife was tilling the soil, 'see, I have found all this butter.'

'Haven't I always told you,' she retorted, 'that a man who is idle is of little use. The one who goes out into the world never returns empty-handed.'

Thus encouraged, the farmer saddled his horse, draped a rug over his shoulders,

placed his *beulo*, his hat of bamboo, on his head and set off on his journey, his dog trailing along behind him.

The strange trio had not gone far when, suddenly, a fox darted across their path. 'I will kill the fox and take the skin back to my wife,' thought the farmer as he gave chase.

The fox, not to be outwitted, had dashed into a marshy bog and sought refuge in a hollow log. Undaunted, the farmer swiftly dismounted, removed his clothes, made them into a bundle and tied the bundle on to the saddle. Then he tried to climb into the log, but the wily fox had already escaped from the other end.

The dog gave chase to the fox, and the horse gave chase to the dog. And the farmer found he was left all alone without any clothes on.

Afraid of being seen naked, he descended swiftly into the valley, hiding behind bushes from time to time. At last, at nightfall he reached a neighbouring country where a powerful king resided. Working his way past the palace guards, he found himself outside the royal stables. There, inside one of the stalls, he hid himself under some hay. That night he slept a deep and dreamless sleep.

\* \* \*

The next morning, the king's daughter went as usual to see her favourite horse. And as she stroked him, the diamond necklace she was wearing fell, unnoticed, near the stall where the farmer lay hidden.

A short time later a cow wandered into the stables and neatly dropped a mound of dung on the princess's necklace.

Soon after this a maidservant from the palace arrived with a broom and a pan, and when she saw the dung on the stable floor, she scooped it into the pan and threw it on to the wall. Later that day pandemonium broke loose when it was discovered that the princess had lost her necklace.

All day the only subject of conversation was the lost necklace. The servants in the palace discussed it among themselves in hushed voices. The grooms talked of nothing else as they attended the horses in the stables. As is usual in times of crisis, the entire kingdom soon buzzed like a beehive, with rumours of the princess's lost necklace.

Then the king summoned his ministers, the ministers sent for the lamas, and the lamas called for astrologers. They argued and they discussed, and speculated until the early hours of the morning, still the necklace could not be traced.

'Where is that necklace?' roared the king.

No one could tell for no one knew.

Just about then a stablehand went to groom the horses. As he began to rake the fodder in the stall where the farmer was hidden, a head suddenly protruded from amongst the hay.



They had not gone far when a fox darted across their path.

'A-a-a-e-e-e-i-i-i-e-e,' screeched the groom as he stared fascinated at the uncomely sight of the farmer whose head was covered with bits of straw.

'I'm a soothsayer,' came the gruff reply. 'You may inform His Majesty, that I alone can find the missing necklace.'

Trembling with fear and excitement, the servant went into the palace and conveyed the message to the king.

'Why have you not brought him to me?' enquired the king.

'Your Majesty,' trembled the stablehand, 'the man has no clothes on.'

'No clothes? You mean he is naked?' and the king roared with laughter.

'Give him some clothes that befit a soothsayer, and bring him before me,' was the royal command.

And so the poor farmer duly appeared before the king.

The farmer had never before been in the presence of so august a personage. Nevertheless, confident of his secret, he bowed low before the king.

'Can you find my daughter's necklace?' asked the king.

The farmer bowed, 'I can Your Majesty, but first I must have the head of a pig, a stout staff, five coloured flags, blue, white, yellow, green and red; also a *torma*, a special ceremonial offering.'

As soon as these were provided, the farmer placed the pig's head and the flags on the staff, then he put the staff on the *torma* and invited the lamas to perform their religious ceremonies.

For three days and three nights the ceremonies continued, and when they were over the farmer requested the king to send for all the subjects in his kingdom. When they had assembled outside the palace gates, the farmer walked amongst them with the *torma* held high above his head.

'None of your subjects has the necklace Your Majesty,' he informed the king. 'Now we must go through the palace grounds and the stables.'

The entire retinue of ministers, lamas and servants followed the farmer. When they reached the stables the farmer placed the *torma* in front of the heap of dung on the stable wall.

'It lies here,' he said in an imperious tone, as he brandished the *torma* for all to see.

The ministers looked sceptical, and so did the lamas and the servants. But the farmer was adamant. He brandished the *torma* once more and nodded his head. So the servants obediently removed the dung from the wall and tore it apart. And there it was, the princess's diamond necklace!

There was great rejoicing in the palace. The king was greatly impressed and made a proclamation:

'This man is indeed great. Henceforward he shall be known as Moten Phago, the soothsayer with the pig's head.'

'Make me a request and it shall be granted,' said the king as he turned towards the poor farmer.

Moten Phago, as he came to be called, could only think of the prized possessions he had lost.

'Your Majesty, all I want is a horse and saddle, a *beulo*, a rug, a dog and a fox.'

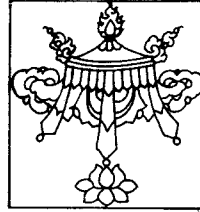
Astonished at this simple request, the king provided Moten Phago with whatever he had requested and then sent him on his journey home with gifts of rice, meat and butter as well.

When Moten Phago reached his farm, his wife was amazed at his successful adventure. And when he narrated his story, she nodded her head wisely.

'As I told you, the man who goes out into the world and finds something to do, never returns empty-handed.'



# Moten Phago and the Demons



One day a certain king, while walking in the forest with his six younger brothers, encountered a beautiful maiden and a *dzo*, which is a cross between a cow and a yak.

The king, who was captivated by the exquisite beauty of the maiden, asked her from where she had come. She replied that she was a princess from a southern kingdom and had come in search of a *dzo* which had strayed into the forest.

Now the king was unaware that the princess was really a demon transformed into a beautiful maiden, and that the *dzo* was her demon husband. He was so bewitched by the maiden's beauty that he asked her to be his wife. She readily agreed. So the fair maiden, accompanied by the *dzo*, went with the king to his kingdom to be his queen.

There in the palace they both lived, the demon queen and the *dzo*, her demon husband. No one, least of all the king, knew they had in their midst two of the most fearsome evil spirits in the entire land.

As time passed, the two demons devoured the six young princes, one by one.

There was turmoil in the kingdom, each of the princes, in turn, had suddenly disappeared. No one could shed any light on the mystery. In vain, the search for the young princes continued.

Finally, the king fell ill and took to his bed. As his condition gradually worsened, his trusted ministers met in secret consultation and decided they would send for the farmer, Moten Phago, whose fame as a great soothsayer had spread far and wide.

Moten Phago's village was two mountains away, and as the journey on foot would take several weeks, four chosen horsemen were sent to fetch him. Through the valleys and over the mountains they sped, and arrived at the farmer's house, only to find him in deep meditation.

The farmer's wife, reluctant to disturb her husband who had of late taken to religion, requested the horsemen to rest and refresh themselves, and told them that the soothsayer would join them presently.

When Moten Phago appeared, they fell to their knees and each, in turn, beseeched:

'The king is dying!'

'He has been bewitched!'

'He is at your mercy!'

'Save him!'

Nonplussed, Moten Phago hesitated, knowing full well that to find the source of the king's illness was far beyond his power.

'I cannot go just yet,' he replied. 'My departure will depend upon tonight's dream. Sleep in peace. On the morrow you will have my answer.'

That night Moten Phago, who had great faith in his wife's wisdom and practical commonsense said, 'Wife, whatever shall I do? It was by good fortune alone that I happened to know where the princess's necklace lay hidden. How am I to know what ails this king?'

'Do not fret, dear husband,' she replied, 'remember, whenever you have gone out into the world you have never returned empty-handed. Go to the dying king; some good will come out of this, I am certain.'

In the morning Moten Phago announced that he had indeed had a wonderful dream, and had decided that he would accompany the four horsemen.

Moten Phago astride his horse carried a staff with a pig's head on it and five coloured flags, blue, white, yellow, green and red. As he rode he chanted the prayer, *Om mani padme hum*, monotonously.

The arrival of the party at the palace gates had been witnessed by the two demons. They immediately recognized the staff with the pig's head. Afraid that their identity would soon be revealed, they ran in panic—the queen to the darkest chamber in the palace, and the *dzo* to an underground passage, deep down beneath the palace grounds.

Meanwhile, Moten Phago had made a large *torma*, which he placed near the king's head. He fixed the flags and the staff with the pig's head on the *torma*. Then he sat beside the *torma* in meditation, fervently praying that there would be some response from the king.

Suddenly the king sighed in his sleep. Moten Phago, fearing the king had breathed his last, picked up the *torma* and dashed out of the room seeking some means of escape. He rushed blindly into a storeroom, then a kitchen, followed by cries of 'Thief!' 'Thief!' from the guards outside the king's chamber.

The courtiers hearing the cries, gave chase, and Moten Phago found himself in a maze of passages. Terrified and exhausted, he ran and ran, until he reached the underground passage where the *dzo* had concealed himself. In the dark passage, Moten Phago stumbled over the massive beast. Grasping the shaggy hair and not quite knowing what it was, he raised his staff and hit the *dzo* on the head. The terrified *dzo* made straight for the dark chamber where the queen had hidden, followed closely by the bewildered soothsayer.

Outside the darkened chamber Moten Phago heard the *dzo* say, 'What should we do? It is said this Moten Phago is a sorcerer and has the power to change demons into stone. He has already hit me once with the pig's staff, twice more and I shall be turned to stone.'

The queen replied, 'That is the reason why I have hidden myself here. Stay with me, we are safe in the dark.'

'We cannot run away,' she continued, 'being a sorcerer he will know where to find us.'

Moten Phago satisfied that he had learned all there was to know about the demons, hastened back to the king's bedside and resumed his meditative pose.

Just then the king stirred and opened his eyes, and the first thing he saw was the *torma* with the flags, and the staff with the pig's head.

'Ah! Moten Phago,' he cried joyously to the soothsayer, 'your holy presence has made me well again. Tell me what was the cause of my illness?'

'Your Majesty,' came the reply, 'the cause of your illness will be disclosed tomorrow. First, I must request you to order all the men in your kingdom to assemble outside the palace walls tomorrow morning, armed with bows and arrows. The women must bring bundles of firewood with them.'

The next morning, before dawn, all the men of the kingdom assembled with their bows and arrows outside the palace. The women as they arrived with their bundles of firewood, arranged them in a large heap as directed.

Then Moten Phago arrived astride the *dzo*, a blazing torch in one hand, and the staff with the pig's head in the other. There was silence as he approached the crowd, and they watched with awe as he brandished the blazing torch and set fire to the wood.

Then as he jumped off the *dzo's* back he struck it with the staff. 'Change into your true form!' he challenged.

Cries of horror rent the air as the terrible demon materialized, blood dripping from its eyes, and its ghastly fangs gnashing at the cowering crowd.

'Kill the demon!' cried Moten Phago as he picked up a bow and shot the first arrow into the beast.

Hundreds of arrows followed and pierced the demon's body, and soon its lifeless form was thrown on the burning pyre.

'Now bring out the queen!' ordered the soothsayer.

The king, alarmed, turned to find that the queen had been dragged through the palace gates by the guards. And as Moten Phago touched her with his staff and commanded her to transform herself, she, too, turned into a hideous demon. Moten Phago's arrow was the first to strike her, and as her shrieks filled the air, a shower of arrows followed. Then the crowd surged forward and threw the corpse of the demon queen on to the fire, where it was consumed.



'Stay with me, we are safe in the dark.'

There was great rejoicing in the land, the festivities continued for a week. People came from all over the kingdom with gifts for the great soothsayer who had rid them of the demons.

The king was overwhelmed with gratitude. 'Moten Phago,' he said, 'I owe you my life. How can I repay you?'

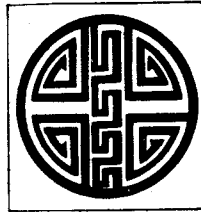
'Give me a rope, Your Majesty,' he replied, 'I have no rope with which to tie my cow and ox.'

The king, amazed at this simple request, sent for the stoutest rope in the kingdom. Along with the rope, twenty packhorses laden with a supply of food to last a year, clothes and costly jewels, accompanied Moten Phago back to his farm.

His wife was greatly pleased that her husband had returned home safe and well. More so when she discovered that his journey into the world had proved so profitable an adventure. She could not help but ask, 'How is it that you have brought so much wealth back with you? Surely you must have performed some miracle.'

'It was no miracle,' said the simple farmer. 'The demons thought I was a sorcerer, and it was the pig's head they feared. Little did they know they had only themselves to fear. Come wife, let us eat and I'll tell you the story.'

# The Abominable Snowman



The rays of the setting sun illuminated the sky, tinting the snow-covered peaks of Chomolhari, the Divine Mountain, with a rosy hue. Nagzi Pasang, a *sharop*, a hunter from the Valley of Paro, paused in his search for the *migyoe*, the dreaded *yeti* of the snows, to gaze at the magical splendour of the mountain. He never ceased to wonder at the serene beauty of Chomolhari, the sacred abode of the guardian deity, Jo-mo-lhari. It had stood for centuries, a majestic sentinel over the valley. And no man had ever been known to desecrate its revered summit.

Now, scarcely a week ago, old Sonam Lhundub, who had gone to retrieve a lost yak from the snowy mountain slopes, had quite by chance discovered a set of the unmistakable footprints of the *migyoe*, embedded in the snow.

He had rushed headlong down into the valley with the astonishing news. How could the terrifying monster have wandered so far from its normal haunts, the Masa Kang of the northern range? Yet, it had to be true, for Sonam Lhundub was never known to indulge in flights of fantasy.

So Nagzi Pasang, the lone hunter of Paro, had volunteered to track down and chase away the awesome intruder. He had set off at dawn, armed with a bow, a quiver full of arrows, and a sharp hunting knife, and stopped only briefly at Druk Yul's oldest and most sacred monastery, the Kyichu Lhakhang, to offer prayers and present a *khadhar*, at its holy shrine.

For six days he had trudged through the Valley of Paro, fought his way through the dense highland jungles at the foot of the Chomolhari, and had then begun the ascent up the snow-clad mountain. He had to struggle knee-deep through drifts of freshly fallen snow, and contend with bitter blinding cold.

But it was not so much the cold that bothered the *sharop*, wrapped securely as he was in his thick, sheepskin coat, as the fear that he might miss the footprints of the dreaded *migyoe*. And now, as his sharp eyes searched for signs of the half-man half-beast, he marvelled at himself for daring to undertake such a dangerous venture.

Suddenly, there before him were the distinct footprints of the *yeti*, just as Sonam Lhundub had described. The length of the strides was shorter than he

had expected, but the footprints themselves were huge. Then, abruptly, the prints ceased, and Nagzi Pasang, too, halted in his tracks. He had been so intent on tracing the footprints that he did not notice that they led to a small shack; a crude shelter of stone and rubble, used by the Drogpas, a race of nomads, in the summer months, when the snows melted. He traced the footprints twice around the shack only to find that they disappeared into the distance.

If the *migyoe* had been encircling the hut in search of prey, it would undoubtedly return. There was nothing he could do but wait.

The sun had set and the sky darkened with threatening clouds. A cold wind, heavily laden with snow, beat against the hunter as he struggled to open the door of the shack. Nagzi Pasang knew the signs of a blizzard only too well. With winter fast approaching, it could confine him in the shack for days or even weeks, depending upon its intensity.

Again he tried the door of the shack; it held fast. Mustering all his strength he pushed, and it flew open, revealing a welcome sight—a single room with a fireplace, dry logs piled in one corner and sheepskins on the floor. The wooden shutters at the windows were tightly sealed to keep out the intense cold.

Nagzi Pasang first lit a fire whose dancing flames soon brought warmth and comfort into the darkened room. Next he placed a pot of snow on the fire to boil, and when it began to bubble he poured dry yak powder from a leather pouch into it.

As he sipped the steaming hot soup, all the fatigue and tension of the past three days began to disappear. He removed his coat and stretched out on a sheepskin before the fire to begin his lonely vigil.

All night long he kept the fire alight, adding dry logs whenever it showed signs of dying out. Towards the early hours of the morning drowsiness overcame him, and he slumbered.

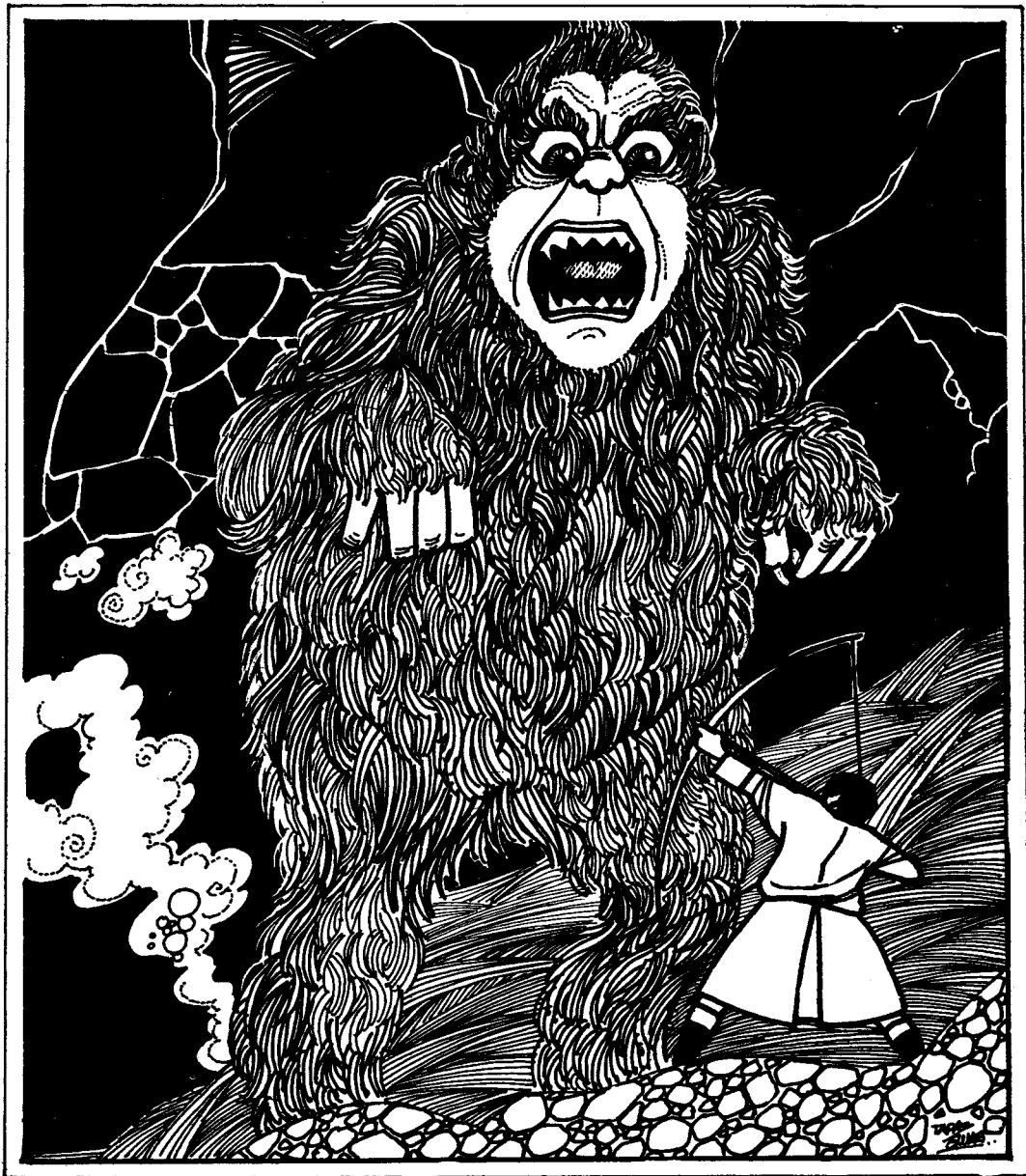
Then, without any warning it happened. A piercing shriek, almost human, rose sharply over the howling of the wind. 'Ai-e-e-e, ai-e-e-e-e, ai-e-e-e-e,' resounded the shriek as it gathered momentum. The dreaded *migyoe* was there outside.

At the first cry, the *sharop* awoke and groped for his bow; his mind alert and body tense for the attack.

The door trembled at the first blow; the enraged beast battered at it a second time and it flew open.

Nagzi Pasang had, since childhood, heard stories of the *migyoe*, half-man, half-beast, which roamed the Himalayan range. But nothing in his wildest imaginings had prepared him for the ghastly apparition which filled the doorway.

It forced its way in, bent almost double, then straightened up once it was inside. The horrendous creature, covered with shaggy grey hair, loomed like a colossus not twenty feet from the hunter. Nagzi Pasang, in that brief moment



With a supreme effort he placed an arrow in his bow and took aim.



before the *migyoe* advanced upon him, saw the face—more man than beast, the shrivelled skin brown and wrinkled, like the face of a very old man.

Its frenzied eyes filled with hate, held him powerless. With a supreme effort he placed an arrow in his bow and took aim. One arrow would have to suffice, right between the eyes. He knew there would be no time for another.

In that moment of terror the *sharop* knew for a certainty that his hour had come. His aim went wild and the arrow lodged in the beast's shoulder.

With another cry even more terrifying than the first, the *yeti* was upon him. In desperation he fumbled for his knife and found he had dropped it. Then, as a massive paw struck him he stumbled, grabbed frantically at a burning log and drove it into the advancing beast.

\* \* \*

A severe winter had set in, and the Valley of Paro lay covered in a mantle of snow. The farmhouses scattered in the valley seemed deserted, but inside each home, snow-bound in winter, day-to-day activity continued. Except for the empty home of Nagzi Pasang, the hunter. His home alone was deserted.

As time passed, it became evident to all that Nagzi Pasang had fallen prey to the evil monster. But one day to the amazement of the inhabitants of Paro, he returned to the valley, exhausted and frightened; and related the tale of his horrifying encounter with the *migyoe*. He told an incredible story of how he had fought it single-handed and driven away the horrifying creature. He claimed he had lain for days in the desolate shack in the mountain until some monks had found him badly mauled and unconscious, and had taken him to the Haddi Gompa, the monastery at the foot of the Chomolhari. There they nursed him until he recovered. It is doubtful if the villagers believed him, he had no proof to show that any such thing had ever happened.

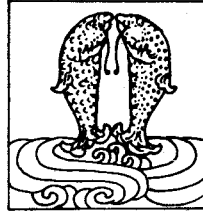
Nevertheless, some time later, a traveller, while passing through the Valley of Paro, brought news of another heroic peasant who had fought with a *migyoe* on the Masa Kang. It was only then that the villagers began to believe what Nagzi Pasang had told them.

The peasant, a shepherd from Laya, a village at the foot of the Masa Kang, had had a brief fight with the abominable snowman. Armed with only a staff, he succeeded in beating off his formidable opponent. How he managed this seemingly impossible feat is difficult to say. Perhaps it was just a stroke of good luck.

The question that puzzled the villagers of Paro for a long time was whether the *migyoe* of the Chomolhari and the *migyoe* of the Masa Kang were one and the same. No one seemed sufficiently interested to find out the truth.

No matter, since the *migyoe* was never heard of again. The talk soon died down and the horror of this dreadful beast was almost forgotten, though this story is still told from time to time.

# The Return of the Fugitives



A long time ago, there was a small kingdom in the land of Lho Mon, where everyone was happy. The valley in which this kingdom lay was protected by high mountains. It was a most beautiful valley. The soil was rich and fertile, there were flowers and fruit in abundance, green pastures for cattle to graze, streams where fish were plentiful and thick forests with flowering shrubs and trees.

Kunnang, the king of this small kingdom, was good and kind, and his subjects loved him dearly. But little did the good king dream that, soon, the peace and serenity of the 'happy valley' would be shattered.

Tragedy struck when the queen died after the birth of her first child, young Prince Nyimai Odzer. The grief-stricken king was inconsolable; weeks and months passed before he paid any heed to the advice of his councillors.

'The young prince is almost a year old,' said one councillor.

'Surely, Your Majesty, it is not good for the little one to be constantly in the care of maidservants,' cried another.

'The prince needs a mother,' advised a third councillor.

Finally, for the sake of the young prince, the king agreed to remarry. Soon the news spread to other kingdoms, and it was not long before messengers arrived with marriage proposals.

The king bided his time, until one day a demon in the guise of an old sage arrived at the palace. He spoke of the king and queen of a neighbouring kingdom who were childless, but had fostered a baby girl who had been abandoned in the forest. The young princess had grown into a beautiful and wise young maiden. The sage suggested that the princess be brought before the king.

The king was captivated by the calm and peaceful mien of the fair young maid. But his first thought was for his son, and he felt that she would be good and kind to his motherless child. But the king did not know that the princess was actually a wicked demon in human guise.

The new queen played her part well. But she soon came to realize that the king loved his son more than anything in the world. Her jealousy grew with the passing of each day, and she was determined to get rid of the young prince. So,

when her own son, Dawa Odzer, was born, and the king still showed preference for the older boy, the jealous queen schemed and plotted for the death of Prince Nyimai Odzer; and waited for an opportune moment to put her plan into action.

One day, while the king was away, the wicked queen feigned illness and took to her bed. For three days she rejected the ministrations of her maids-in-waiting and sent away the physicians who hastened to her chamber. On the fourth day, when the king returned, he found the queen pale and listless.

'What ails you?' asked the king, fearing that the queen had contracted an incurable malady.

'It's nothing,' she whispered faintly.

'My love, they tell me you have sent the physicians away. Surely, if there is a cure, they alone can help?'

'My lord, I have had this illness since I was a child. It is the result of a curse that was laid upon me. The cure itself is so hateful that I threatened my father and mother that I would sacrifice my life if they attempted to make it known.'

'Do you have so little faith in me,' asked the king, 'that you cannot tell me what it is? There is nothing I would not do to see you well again.'

The queen was secretly triumphant, 'My lord, if I am to be cured then one of the sons of the man to whom I am married must be sacrificed, only his death can save me.'

The king was aghast. 'What you suggest is impossible!'

The queen, seeing the agony and the horror in his eyes, pressed her point, 'I warned you how hateful it was. Therefore let me die in peace.'

'No, no, give me time to think,' groaned the unhappy monarch, as he stumbled out of the room. In his haste he almost knocked down his younger son, who was standing at the threshold and had heard what his mother had said.

Dawa Odzer rushed through the palace in search of his elder brother. At last he found Nyimai Odzer in his room and could not refrain from weeping as he told his brother what he had heard. They could only guess that it would be the older brother who would have to die.

'Now that you have warned me, I have nothing to fear,' said Nyimai Odzer. 'Tonight, while everyone is asleep, I shall leave the palace.'

'I shall go with you,' cried Dawa Odzer.

'No,' replied his brother quietly, 'your place is with your mother. My father, the king, and your mother, will have need of you when I am gone.'

Dawa Odzer wept and with great difficulty managed to persuade his brother not to leave him behind. So Nyimai Odzer finally agreed to take Dawa Odzer with him.

Before leaving, the two brothers, taking nothing with them except the clothes they were wearing, went to the *lhakhang*, the temple, within the palace grounds,

to receive the blessing of the old lama. They confided in him and explained their reason for leaving at the dead of night.

The lama blessed them and gave them some *torma*, ceremonial offering, and advised them to go towards the east.

'Follow the sunrise, that is where your destiny lies,' he advised.

The two young princes made their way out of the palace, through the city and along the ancient roads, eastward. They walked until sunrise, then exhausted and hungry they rested under a tree by the roadside and ate some of the *torma* the old lama had given them. In this manner they continued their journey until they came to the eastern mountains. They were the most forbidding mountains they had ever seen. They towered skywards, steep, rocky and barren. Nyimai Odzer's heart sank and his courage almost failed him at the thought of crossing them. Dawa Odzer, weak and faint, begged his brother to leave him behind. But the elder brother took him on his back and laboriously crossed two mountain ridges.

Finally they came to an enormous rock with a bright-red door embedded in it. The door yielded to their touch, and Nyimai Odzer found himself in a large cave at one end of which sat an old hermit deep in meditation. He placed his brother before the hermit, and seated himself silently beside the old man.

After a while, the hermit opened his eyes and asked Nyimai Odzer who they were and what they wanted.

The prince explained why he and his brother had run away from his father's kingdom. He begged the old hermit to let them stay with him as they had nowhere else to go.

'I am alone,' said the old man, 'you may stay with me and be my sons. Come, eat and rest. When you have regained your strength I will instruct you, for there is much you have to learn.'

Time passed, and the two young princes grew to manhood. The old saint taught them all he knew, and imparted to them his knowledge of the holy scriptures of Lord Buddha. But he was always afraid that, although the wicked queen lived far away in another kingdom, she would come to know of their whereabouts. He cautioned them to keep aloof from the people of the surrounding villages and the two young princes remained content in the company of the sage.

Now it happened that, in the mountainous kingdom in which they lived, there was a large lake which acted as a reservoir for all the villages. Water was directed through channels down into the valley, so it was seldom necessary for the villagers to frequent the lake itself.

But once every year, at the beginning of summer, people from all parts of the kingdom would assemble on the shores of the lake to witness *chhoga*, a sacrificial ceremony, which was performed to appease the serpents of the lake. A male youth born in the Year of the Tiger, had to be sacrificed. When this was done,

there was always more than sufficient water in the lake. If, in any particular year, no male youth fulfilling the requirements was found, the serpents, in anger, would cause a scarcity of water.

One year, no male child born in the Year of the Tiger could be found in the kingdom. Court messengers went from village to village, from house to house, in frantic haste. But they came up with the same answer every time; there was no male child born in the Year of the Tiger. Eventually, when the messengers had given up hope and had decided to abandon the search, they arrived at a village where they heard that, not far from the lake, a youth had been seen who claimed to be born in the Year of the Tiger. This was confirmed by another villager who said that there were two brothers, one of whom was said to have been born in the Year of the Tiger. They were disciples of the old hermit who lived in a cave not far from the lake.

When the king of this mountainous kingdom, King Wangchhen, heard the news, he immediately sent two of his ablest ministers to fetch the sage and his disciples. The messengers set off on their mission, and when they reached the hermit's cave they knocked on the door. The old hermit came out to see who it was, and on hearing the demand feared for the life of Nyimai Odzer. He shook his head in denial.

'I have no one with me,' he said, 'I am an old man, I live alone. Do not harass me; leave me in peace.'

He re-entered the cave and hurriedly hid the two young princes in a secret cavern at the far end of the cave. Then he concealed all evidence that would betray the presence of Nyimai Odzer and his brother.

Meanwhile, the messengers began to hammer on the door, shouting threats and abuses at the old man, until he let them in. When they found the cave empty, they began to belabour the old man.

Nyimai Odzer hearing the cries of his foster father, rushed out of the secret chamber crying, 'Do not hurt my father. I am here, you may do what you will with me.'

The young prince's hands were bound and he was led away. Dawa Odzer and the old saint wept as they watched him go. They had heard of the fate of others who had similarly been taken away and knew they could do nothing to help Nyimai Odzer.

The court messengers, excited at the prospect of a rich reward, hurried their captive to the palace. King Wangchhen, when he saw the youth, stared at his handsome countenance and princely bearing. 'This is no ordinary village lad,' he thought to himself. 'He is a young prince. I wonder to which kingdom he belongs.'

The king was in a quandary. He did not know what to do with the stranger

that had been brought to him. He hesitated to offer him as a sacrifice to the serpent-gods of the lake, for he did not wish to incur the wrath of the kings of the neighbouring kingdoms. On the other hand, if no other male youth born in the Year of the Tiger was found, the serpents of the lake would exact their punishment. As he could not make up his mind immediately, he decided to keep the young lad in the palace as a royal guest, until such time as he could do so.

So the months passed and the search for another male child or youth born in the Year of the Tiger continued. And Nyimai Odzer, meanwhile, came to know and befriend the king's daughter, the beautiful Kesang. They fell in love, exchanging secret vows never to part.

The day of the *chhoga* drew near, and people came in thousands, from all parts of the kingdom, demanding that the youth born in the Year of the Tiger be offered in sacrifice. King Wangchhen had no option but to comply. The young princess wept and begged her father to spare Nyimai Odzer. But the king was adamant, 'I have no choice, my child,' he said.

'Then throw me into the lake, too, my father,' she entreated, 'for my life is meaningless without him.'

The king, infuriated that his daughter preferred to die with an unknown youth than live with her father, ordered that a dual sacrifice be made. The young lovers, tied together, were to be thrown into the lake.

On the day of the *chhoga*, crowds of people assembled at the lake. The crowd was far greater than usual, for the whisper had circulated that the royal princess had demanded to be sacrificed with the youth born in the Year of the Tiger. The awe-struck spectators watched in silence as the lovers, tied back to back, were thrown into the deep waters of the lake, amidst chanting and the sound of drums and cymbals.

Then a strange thing happened. The dark waters began to bubble like molten metal in a cauldron, and the young couple reappeared and were swept towards the shore of the lake. And then the lake, as though satiated, rushed its banks and went cascading down into the valley. Wonder-struck at this miracle, the crowds gradually dispersed, until Nyimai Odzer and Princess Kesang, miraculously free of their bonds, stood and gazed in awe at one another.

'You must go and assure your father that there is no need for any further sacrifices,' said Nyimai Odzer, 'and I will go and see how my father and brother have fared in my absence.'

There was no need for the princess to tell King Wangchhen of the miracle at the lake. The news had preceded her. There were tears in his eyes as he folded her in his arms, and begged her to tell him how he could make amends for his cruelty.

'Father,' said Princess Kesang, 'I survived because of Nyimai Odzer. His

virtue and his faith have given him great power. The serpents of the lake recognized this, that is why I stand before you today. He will come and ask for my hand in marriage, please do not refuse it! This is my one request, I implore you, don't deny me!

'Where is Nyimai Odzer?' asked the king.

'He has gone to seek the blessings of his father. He asked me to tell you before he left that there is no further need for sacrifice. The serpents have been appeased. There will never be shortage of water again.'

\* \* \*

Meanwhile, Nyimai Odzer arrived at the cave to find that his brother had fallen ill soon after he had been taken away. And the old sage, fearing that he would soon lose both sons, no longer had the will to live. Shocked at the condition of these two, whom he dearly loved, Nyimai Odzer first bowed low before the old hermit, then sitting at his brother's bedside, he narrated all that had happened to him.

'I am deeply grateful to you, father,' he said, 'for without your spiritual guidance I would most certainly have been killed by the serpents.'

Just then there was a knock on the door, and Nyimai Odzer opened it to find that a deputation had arrived with a message from King Wangchhen. The ministers and courtiers who came bearing gifts from the king said that Nyimai Odzer, his brother and the sage were requested to return with them to the palace.

The horses that were provided for the journey were the finest in the land, and it was not long before they were at the palace gates. The king himself was there to receive them, and they were escorted into the palace amidst much rejoicing.

Then King Wangchhen asked, 'Tell me who you are, Nyimai Odzer. None who has been sacrificed to the serpents of the lake has so far survived. Tell me, are you the son of this saintly man?'

Nyimai Odzer smiled as he replied, 'The reason for my survival rests with this holy man who, though not my real father, has been more than a father to me. My father is the powerful King Kunnang.' Then he went on to tell the story of how he and his brother had found shelter with the old hermit.

The king, greatly impressed with what he had heard, decided that there should be no more delay, and Prince Nyimai Odzer and Princess Kesang were married. Then, at the insistence of the king, they went to receive the blessings of King Kunnang, accompanied by Prince Dawa Odzer and the old sage.

A messenger was sent ahead to inform King Kunnang of the arrival of his son, Prince Nyimai Odzer, and his bride. The king, who had lost all hope of ever finding his sons again, could scarcely contain his joy when the messenger arrived



The dark waters began to bubble like molten metal in a cauldron and the young couple reappeared.



with the news. But the queen's reaction was frightful to behold. As she screamed and cursed those about her, her face and body were transformed into those of a hideous demon. With a shriek she collapsed dead on the floor.

Prince Nyimai Odzer and Princess Kesang lived happily ever after. And when King Kunnang died, Prince Nyimai Odzer became king.

Needless to say, with the death of the demon queen, all sorrow and misfortune disappeared from the kingdom, and once again the valley came to be known as the Happy Valley.

# The Serpent's Bride



Once long ago, in southern Lho Mon, there dwelt a wealthy farmer and his seven daughters. The youngest, Sonam Lhamo, was the most beautiful of them all.

Strange as it may seem, six of the girls were successively named after the days of the week. When the first child was born the farmer's wife insisted on naming her Nyima or Sunday. The second was called Dawa, then came Mikmar, Lhakpa, Phurbu and Pasang. Then after the birth of the last child his wife suddenly died, and the naming of his youngest daughter fell upon the wealthy farmer. He named her Sonam Lhamo, goddess of fortune.

The names of the six older girls, had, over the years, caused much laughter in the village. And when Sonam Lhamo was born, the teasing continued as her name seemed so incongruous. The father ignored the jokes which were directed at his family; anyway, there was nothing he could do about it. He was far too busy with the task of raising his seven daughters.

The farmer's work took him, from time to time, to the neighbouring villages. Once he had to go farther north, to the Valley of Ha, to buy two oxen. For two whole days he travelled on horseback. And after having successfully accomplished his work, he decided to return home by a shorter, but unfamiliar route. He had to travel slowly, hampered as he was by the oxen which followed behind him.

The farmer rode for miles and miles through bare, rocky country. Then, to his relief, he came, by chance, upon a lake surrounded by lush green grass and shady trees. Near the lake stood a magnificent mansion, and to the right of the mansion was an orchard. The farmer was very pleased with his discovery. He quickly released the animals and went to investigate. The trees were laden with large, ripe, juicy fruit of various kinds. He broke as much of the fruit as he could and tied them all into his blanket. Suddenly he heard a sharp piercing voice.

'What are you doing in my orchard?' it demanded.

The bewildered farmer looked around, but saw no one.

'I am here, in the apple tree,' said the voice.

The farmer looked up into the tree and was horror-stricken! He saw a serpent, the largest he had ever seen. Part of its gigantic body was coiled around the trunk

of the tree, while the rest curled around the lowest branch. The serpent's black, beady eyes glistened as it stared at the guilty farmer; and its long, forked tongue flicked in and out of its mouth as it spoke.

'Who gave you permission to break my fruit?' asked the snake.

'There is so much fruit here; I saw no harm in taking some home to my daughters,' he said apologetically.

'Well,' the serpent replied, 'since you have taken my fruit, it is right that you pay for it.'

'Gladly,' said the farmer, 'you may have my oxen or my horse, whichever you wish.'

'What would I do with your oxen or your horse, I have no need of them. I will tell you what I want. You can give me one of your daughters in marriage, instead.'

'What,' gasped the wretched man, 'I cannot give you any of my daughters!'

'Then, I have no alternative but to eat you.'

'Give me time to think this over,' begged the confused farmer.

'When the moon is full, you will return with one of your daughters. The one you bring will be my bride.' Saying this the serpent slithered down from the tree and disappeared into the mansion.

As he journeyed homewards the distracted father was in a dilemma. Either he or one of his daughters would have to be sacrificed. The snake had made that quite clear.

The seven girls greeted their father affectionately when he reached home, and were eager to know what he had brought back from his travels. They were all excited when he opened the bundle and showed them the fruit.

'Wait,' he said, 'there are certain conditions attached to the fruit.'

'Here you are, Nyima,' he offered his eldest daughter a large red apple, 'you may have this, if you agree to marry the serpent who owns the orchard where this apple came from.'

'I do not want the fruit, Father, nor do I wish to be a serpent's bride,' she cried. And she gave the fruit a look of disgust as she left the room. The other sisters quickly followed. Sonam Lhamo, alone remained behind.

'What is the matter, Father?' she asked gently. 'Why does one of us have to marry a serpent?'

Then her father explained, as briefly as possible, how he had come by the fruit and the promise he had made.

'So you see, my child, this demon, for he cannot be anything else, holds me to my promise. When the moon is full he must receive his bride or my life will be forfeit.'

'You have nothing to fear,' consoled the girl, 'I will be his bride.'



Sonam Lhamo watched fascinated as her husband emerged from the lake.

The father protested, but Sonam Lhamo would not be dissuaded. So on the night of the full moon, the macabre wedding was celebrated. Only the bride, the groom and the bride's father were present. And after the ceremony the lovely Sonam Lhamo dwelt in the mansion as the serpent's wife.

Sonam Lhamo was lonely in the days that followed. She saw little of her husband. He remained in the orchard all day, and at night he retired silently to his private chamber. Then unexpectedly, on the night of the full moon, the serpent glided out of the mansion and did not return until the early hours of the morning.

Sonam Lhamo's curiosity was aroused. On the night of the next full moon, she followed her husband at a safe distance. There on the shores of the Singye Tsho, the Lion's Lake, he stopped and, without hesitation, entered the water. From behind the safety of a tree, Sonam Lhamo watched fascinated as her husband emerged from the lake. Before her, in the moonlight, stood a handsome young prince. In his hands he held the skin of the serpent. Swiftly he hid the skin under some bushes and vanished into the darkness.

The following full moon night, Sonam Lhamo went once again to the lake and watched her husband as he emerged from the water and stepped out on to the shore. No sooner had he hidden the snake skin than he disappeared once again. Without hesitation Sonam Lhamo darted forward, seized the gruesome reptile skin and ran home. There on the hearth, she raked the embers and burned it.

At dawn, her husband returned to the mansion. Sonam Lhamo's heart was filled with gladness as she went to greet the handsome young man she had married. But the anger on his face frightened her.

'What have you done with the snake skin?' he asked furiously.

'I have burnt it,' came the quick reply.

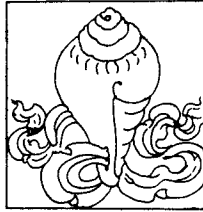
'Do you know what you have done?' he accused. 'When you took the skin didn't you realize I was under a spell?'

'I did not know,' she whispered, sorrowfully.

'You must have known when you saw me come out of the lake,' protested the young prince. 'There was no need for you to burn the skin. If you had waited patiently for the next full moon, the spell would have broken. And I would have revealed myself to you. You have ruined all chances of our happiness. Now I shall never be able to return to my father's kingdom. We will have to spend the rest of our lives in this mansion!'

There, I suppose, they lived happily for many years. And if, at times, Sonam Lhamo regretted her hasty action, we really cannot blame her, for she had lost the only opportunity she ever had of becoming a real princess and living in a beautiful castle with her handsome prince.

# The Mischievous Monkey



In the forests of eastern Bhutan there lived a monkey which was a constant source of trouble to the poor farmers.

'Tamasive', which in Bhutanese means 'naughty', was the name they gave him. And if by chance some mischief had been done, whether or not he was guilty, it was always Tamasive who was held to be the culprit. You cannot really blame the farmers, because Tamasive was always up to tricks. He would run off with the *bangchu* containing their food while they were ploughing their fields; scatter the seeds that were waiting to be sown; pinch the babies, while their mothers were busy transplanting the rice seedlings, and make them cry. There was no end to his mischief.

Now, Tamasive was an extraordinarily intelligent monkey, and he had the gift of being able to communicate with human beings. Or, was it the other way round, did human beings have the power to communicate with him? I forget which. What really matters is that they could understand one another.

One afternoon at the beginning of summer, while Tamasive was foraging around for something to eat, he came across an old man and an old woman who were busy working in a small field. Tamasive watched them from a distance; after a while he drew close and ventured to ask, 'Pray, what are you two doing?'

'That's a silly question,' answered the old man. 'What do you think we are doing? Can't you see we are planting *kewa ngam*?'

*Kewa ngam* is the Bhutanese name for sweet potato. *Kewa ngam* was one of Tamasive's favourite delicacies. He looked around, but try as he would he could not see any sweet potatoes. The old couple were planting long, leafy stems in the soil.

Tamasive was silent for some time. The old couple were so absorbed in their work that they had forgotten he was there.

Suddenly he spoke, 'That is not the way to plant *kewa ngam*.'

The old man, surprised that Tamasive was still around, looked up.

'What do you know about planting *kewa ngam*?' he asked.

Unfortunately the old couple had never heard of Tamasive and his monkey tricks. If they had, they would have been a little more wary of him.

'I know all about planting *kewa ngam*,' replied Tamasive. 'I know a farmer in southern Bhutan who has a special way of planting, and he always has the best crop in the district.'

The old man was impressed, 'Well, tell me how it is done.'

'Well, to begin with,' said Tamasive, 'you must use the *kewa ngam* and not the stem for planting. Cook each piece till it is well done. After that peel it and wrap it in fresh green leaves and then put it in the ground.'

The old man explained to his wife what Tamasive had just said.

Nonsense,' said the old woman. 'Who has ever heard of *Kewa ngam* being cooked before it is planted? This monkey is up to some trick. Take no notice of him.'

'The trouble with you,' grumbled the old man, 'is that you never want to try anything new. Here is a farmer in southern Bhutan who has become rich by doing what I've just told you.' He kept on grumbling until the old woman relented.

'All right,' she said, 'I am prepared to try anything once. You go and collect some fresh green leaves while I cook those *kewa ngam* which we were going to sell in the market.'

So the old woman lit a fire in one corner of the field and put some water to boil in a pot. By the time the old man returned with the leaves the sweet potatoes had been cooked.

Meanwhile, the monkey sat watching with satisfaction while his instructions were being carried out. He licked his lips in anticipation and thought of the royal feast that awaited him.

'Now,' he told the old man when the sweet potatoes were ready and were cooling under a tree, 'peel them and let the good woman wrap each one separately in those green leaves.'

When all the sweet potatoes had been peeled and wrapped, and lay ready to be planted, Tamasive directed the old couple. 'Not too deep in the ground,' he warned, 'or they will rot. Another thing you must remember is to mark each spot where the *kewa ngam* has been planted with a small piece of stick. In this way you will have no difficulty in finding where they are when your crop is ready.'

'This monkey seems to know what he is talking about, don't you agree?' asked the old man.

'Time alone will tell,' replied his wife sceptically.

The old man grunted and went about his work planting the sweet potatoes according to the monkey's instructions. His wife plodded along behind him, wedging a small piece of stick into the soil to mark each spot. When they had covered about half the field the old woman happened to turn round and discovered that the monkey, who had been following them, was enjoying a tasty

meal. Most of the sweet potatoes they had planted had been dug up and eaten and the sticks and leaves lay scattered all over the field.

'Look at that monkey,' she screamed at her husband, 'he has eaten all the *kewangam* we have planted.'

The old man was furious when he discovered that he had been tricked. He chased Tamasive but the monkey was too quick for him. He ran to the nearest tree, which happened to be a guava tree in fruit, and there he sat, eating a juicy ripe guava while he watched the old couple. The old woman waved her hand and shouted angrily, glaring up at him. The old man shouted and then he began to climb the tree on which the monkey sat. The higher Tamasive went the higher the old man climbed, until finally, when Tamasive was almost on the topmost branch, the old man managed to catch hold of his leg and began to pull him down.

Tamasive began to cry, he knew the old man would not spare him once he had him on the ground.

'Let me go,' he begged. 'I promise not to give you any more trouble. If you let me go I will work for you.'

'You cannot rely on the word of a monkey,' grumbled the old woman. 'He has caused enough mischief as it is.'

But the old man thought it was a good idea to put the mischievous monkey to work. They needed someone to keep an eye on the grain that was lying in the loft, the mice were forever attacking it. So they locked Tamasive in the loft with the grain, and they went back to planting their sweet potatoes. They used their old method of planting just the stems and gave no more thought to the monkey until, a few days later, the old woman said, 'I wonder what tricks that monkey is up to now. Old man, you had better go and see.'

The old man had had enough of monkeys by this time, particularly monkeys such as Tamasive, but he climbed reluctantly into the loft. He was astonished to find a grotesquely fat monkey sitting amongst what was left of the grain. 'All our grain! you've eaten all our grain!' the old man shouted. 'What will we eat this winter?'

He picked up a sack and pushed the monkey, unceremoniously, head-first, into it.

'Wife,' he cried, as he carried the sack into the field where she was working, 'I have that wicked monkey here in a sack. He has finished all our grain, so I've decided to kill him.'

'A good idea,' agreed his wife. 'He must be fat after eating all that grain. So we'll cook him and eat him.'

'We'll do that. Go and fetch the axe and sickle. We'll take him down to the spring where we can wash up after we have killed him!'

By this time Tamasive was really frightened. He began to struggle and shout until the old man put the sack on the ground and asked him what was wrong.





The higher Tamasive went the higher the old man climbed.

'If you want to kill me, old man, you will have to take me down to a place where there is plenty of water, so that you can clean me up properly too.'

'What place would you suggest?' asked the old man.

'Down by the river,' came the reply.

The river was quite a distance from their field. Nevertheless, the old man with the monkey inside the sack slung over his back, followed by the old woman, went along towards the river. It was a warm day, so the old couple were hot and tired by the time they reached the river. The old man threw the sack on the river bank and lay down beside it while the old woman went to the river to drink some water.

No sooner was the old woman's back turned than Tamasive jumped out of the sack and began to run. The old man ran after him, but Tamasive was much too smart for the old man; when he was near enough he picked up some sand from the bank of the river and threw it in his eyes. Then he ran and darted swiftly up a tree.

Hearing the old man's cries, his wife came rushing back.

'What's the matter?' she asked.

'I can't see,' he replied, 'that monkey threw sand in my eyes. Where is he?'

'He has climbed that tree,' she said, pointing to the tree where the monkey sat. The old man groped his way towards the tree, and as he began to climb it, the old woman took the sack and held it open near the foot of the tree.

'Throw that monkey down,' shouted his wife, 'this time I will see he does not escape.'

But Tamasive was not to be outdone. The moment he saw the old man clumsily trying to climb the tree on which he sat, he jumped to the ground and ran into the forest. The old man half-blinded by the sand in his eyes, tumbled from the tree and fell into the sack.

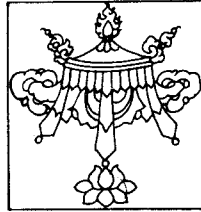
Now, whether the old woman knew that it was not the monkey but her husband who was in the sack, we do not know. But she quickly tied the mouth of the sack with a bit of rope, then taking a thick stick she began to beat and curse him for causing all the trouble.

'Help!' shouted the voice from the sack. 'This is your husband, not the monkey that has caused so much mischief.'

'You may not be the monkey,' she retorted, 'but you are most certainly responsible for all the trouble!' And she proceeded to beat him harder than she had before.

No one really knows what happened to Tamasive. He was never seen again in eastern Bhutan. Perhaps he had had his fill of sweet potatoes, or may be the grain had proved too much for him. No one really cared, least of all the old man and the old woman.

# Sing Sing Lhamo and the Moon



In the south-eastern part of Lho Mon there lived, on a small farm, a poor farmer, his wife and their only child, Sing Sing Lhamo. The farm, which was very small, had only one rice field, some sheep and a couple of pigs. And the solitary orange tree that stood at the edge of the field bore no fruit. Although the farmer and his wife laboured from dawn to dusk, the farm barely sufficed to maintain the family.

Now if Sing Sing Lhamo had been a boy, perhaps her mother may have been more agreeable towards her. But as it happened, she was a girl, and a very plain and unattractive young girl at that. As Sing Sing Lhamo grew older her mother would constantly grumble.

'I don't know what I have done to deserve such an ugly daughter! If only I had a son, he would work in the fields along with his father, and one day marry a rich and beautiful wife.'

Then she would look accusingly at her daughter as if to say she was the cause of all their troubles.

One day, the farmer's wife complained bitterly to her husband.

'We cannot manage with things the way they are. There isn't enough food for all of us. Have you not noticed, our daughter is growing up and now she eats more than both of us together.'

'Be patient,' replied the farmer, 'soon she will marry. Who knows, she may even marry a rich man.'

'No one will want to marry her,' retorted his wife, 'she is so ugly.'

'Ah, but she is strong, and she works hard,' he said.

A few days later the farmer's wife again broached the subject.

'What should we do?' asked the farmer, who was tired of his wife's constant bickering.

'Well, we could leave the farm to Sing Sing Lhamo,' she suggested, 'she will, no doubt, manage quite well on her own. And we can go to your brother in Tongsa, he will surely help us.'

They secretly planned how best they could leave the farm so that their daughter would not know that they were going to run away.

Meanwhile, Sing Sing Lhamo continued, as usual, to feed the pigs every morning. Then she would take the sheep to graze in the meadows. As she was returning home one day, she heard her mother call.

'Daughter, the birds are in the rice field, go quickly and chase them away.'

The girl rushed to the rice field and found that there was not a bird to be seen. Suddenly, hearing a faint sound, she looked up into the orange tree and there, sitting on a branch was a tawny-coloured monkey.

'Go back home, Sing Sing Lhamo,' he said, as he stared sorrowfully at her. 'Your parents are clearing out the house. They want to leave you and run away.'

'I don't believe you,' said the girl. 'You are just trying to get rid of me so that you can eat the paddy.'

Nevertheless, she hurried back to the house to find that her parents were, in truth, clearing it out.

'Are you going away, Mother?' she asked.

'Can't you see we are making place for the paddy, it is ready to be cut. Go and watch the grain. I saw a monkey eating it just now.'

Sing Sing Lhamo returned to the field and found that the grain had not been touched. And the monkey was still in the orange tree.

'Oh, Sing Sing Lhamo,' he said reproachfully, 'you do not believe me! Go back home. Your parents intend to run away so they are preparing food for the journey.'

'You are up to your tricks again,' said Sing Sing Lhamo, 'you want me out of the way so that you can finish all the paddy.' Saying this she went hesitantly towards the house. There she found her mother cooking a vast amount of food.

'Why are you preparing so much food, Mother?' she asked innocently.

'I was bringing the food to you, daughter,' said her mother. 'Now go and start cutting the crop.'

As Sing Sing Lhamo neared the field the monkey shouted, 'Sing Sing Lhamo, your parents have run away.'

Sing Sing Lhamo turned and saw that her parents were some distance from the house. She ran after them crying, 'Wait for me, Mother, don't leave me behind.'

But the farmer and his wife quickened their pace and were soon out of sight. The unfortunate girl followed dejectedly on the road her parents had taken. She was certain that neither of them cared what happened to her, and that the monkey had been right after all.

At dusk, Sing Sing Lhamo came to a fork in the road and stopped, not knowing which way to go. Then to her surprise she saw a large mound of cooked rice on the road to the left. And she followed the road joyfully, certain that her father and mother had left the rice there to direct her.

At nightfall the girl was suddenly afraid. The trees on either side of the road

seemed to tower menacingly above her, and the rocks that loomed in the distance appeared like giants' castles. In desperation she searched for a foothold on an orange tree, and managed to climb into the folds of its leafy branches.

Sing Sing Lhamo dozed. Then, exhausted by the day's work and the long walk, she fell fast asleep.

A shattering roar awakened her.

'What are you doing in my orange tree?'

Startled, the girl looked into the largest, ugliest, and most fearsome face she had ever seen.

'I . . . I . . . I . . . ' stammered Sing Sing Lhamo.

'Who are you?' roared the voice.

'S . . . ing S . . . ing Lhamo,' she quavered.

Then to her horror, a large hairy hand picked her up, and dropped her on the ground.

Shaken and bewildered, the terrified girl stared at the enormous figure before her. This must be giant country, she thought. She had walked straight into a trap!

The giantess glared at her. 'You won't be much use for supper tonight,' she growled. 'We will have to wait and fatten you up.'

Then she picked up Sing Sing Lhamo and threw her into the large *tsehou*, the basket which was strapped on her back.

Sing Sing Lhamo was shaken and badly bruised, but she lay silent, curled up at the bottom of the *tsehou*. The thundering steps of the giantess shook the earth as she stamped homewards. Then, unexpectedly, the giantess stopped, and the girl found herself thrown out of the *tsehou* on to the hard ground.

'Come and see what I have found, child,' shouted the giantess. And a great big child giant came and looked down at the girl.

'What a strange creature,' said the giant's child, 'she's ugly, and she looks so small and skinny.'

'Ha, we'll soon fatten her up,' grinned the giantess. 'Come, let us put her into the pit, she can't escape from there.'

Once again the giantess picked up Sing Sing Lhamo. This time she was thrown into a deep dark pit. How deep it was, she had no idea. But when she looked up at the opening, which seemed so far away, she saw that the pit was part of a colossal underground cave.

That night when the giant came home, his wife told him what she had found.

'Well, see that she does not get out of the pit,' he warned. 'If she steals my magic *phops*, I will become powerless.'

Sing Sing Lhamo heard every word the giant said, and she determined to discover what power the *phops*, the cups, possessed.

So the next morning, after the giant and giantess had left the cave, she kept deliberately silent. After a while the giant's child looked down into the pit and called loudly, 'Are you all right girl? If anything happens to you, my mother will beat me.'

'I am all right,' replied Sing Sing Lhamo. 'Tell me, what are those magic *phops* your father spoke of?'

'Oh, those! He has three. They are the most precious things he owns. One contains rice, and it can change into a mountain, the other has wheat which can turn into a thick forest, and the third has only water, but the water can become a lake or an ocean.'

Sing Sing Lhamo knew she would have to use her wits in order to escape from the clutches of the giants. And she could only do it while they were away.

She waited some time and then called, 'Child giant, your father may have those magic *phops*, but I have something much more powerful.'

'What do you have?' asked the giant's child, her curiosity aroused.

'I have a *norbu*, a jewel, which shows you what is happening in any part of the world. All you have to do is to rub the *norbu*, wish for the thing you want to see, and there it is. I can see exactly where my father and mother are now. They are crossing that high mountain to the east.'

The child giant was intrigued. 'Let me see the *norbu*,' she cried.

'I can only show it to you if you come into the pit,' said Sing Sing Lhamo slyly.

'Wait, I will fetch a ladder.'

A short while later, the giant's child lowered a ladder into the pit and came down.

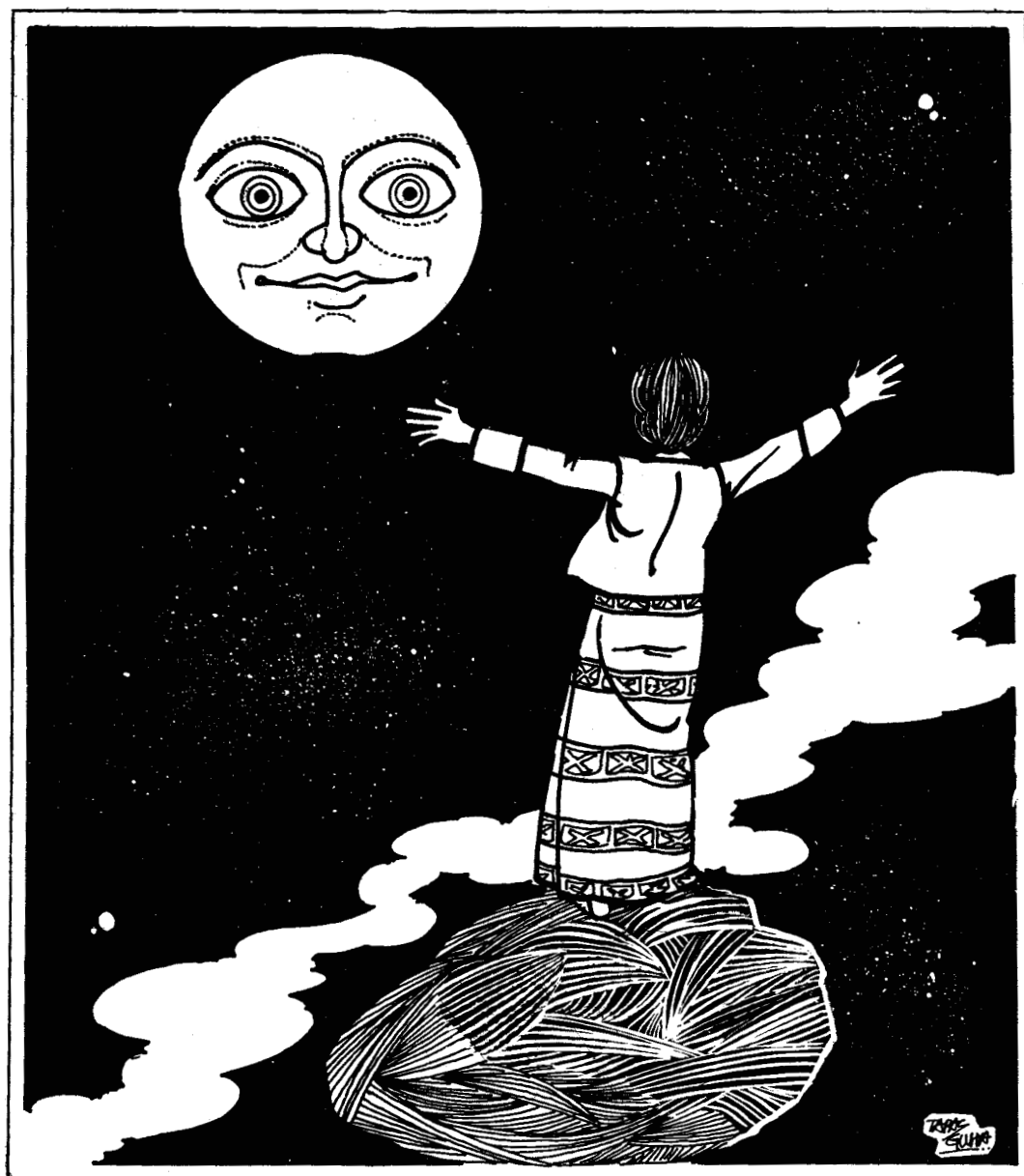
'Where is the *norbu*?' she asked eagerly.

'Here,' replied the girl from the far end of the pit. As the child giant began to grope her way in the dark, Sing Sing Lhamo rushed at her and knocked her down. Then she quickly climbed the ladder, pulling it up after her.

She ignored the screams of fury that came from the bottom of the pit and began searching for the magic *phops*. It was not long before she found them in a niche at the back end of the cave. Placing the *phops* one on top of the other Sing Sing Lhamo ran with them out of the cave and on to the open road.

She had not gone far when she heard the thunderous steps of the giant in pursuit. She immediately threw the rice behind her. Suddenly there was a deep rumbling sound and to her astonishment an enormous mountain arose out of the ground.

The giant wasted no time; he skirted the mountain with colossal strides. And as he neared the girl, she threw the wheat. In an instant a mighty wind whirled around her, and to her amazement a large impenetrable forest appeared separating Sing Sing Lhamo from the giant.



‘Save me Moon, throw down a rope of iron, not a woollen rope.’

Infuriated, the giant strode round the forest, and as he raised his hands to seize her, Sing Sing Lhamo threw the water between them. The swashing sound of waves accompanied the water which formed an ocean before the startled eyes of the giant.

On the other side of the ocean Sing Sing Lhamo stood poised upon a rock with her arms outstretched. She reached towards the moon pleading, 'Save me Moon, throw down a rope of iron, not a woollen rope.'

At that instant an iron rope came rapidly down, and the girl took hold of it with both hands. And she was pulled swiftly up to the moon.

Meanwhile, the giant crossed the ocean and he saw Sing Sing Lhamo go up to the moon. He had heard only the last two words she uttered. So he, too, stood on the rock and roared, 'Moon, throw me a woollen rope.'

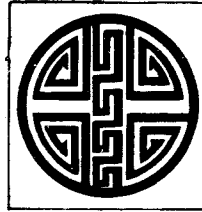
And down came a woollen rope. The giant seized it and began climbing towards the moon. He was more than half-way up when Sing Sing Lhamo ran and fetched a knife. She cut desperately through the woollen rope, and the giant crashed down to the earth and was killed.

You may wonder what became of Sing Sing Lhamo and the three magic *phops*.

Well, the people of Lho Mon say that on a clear night, the face of Sing Sing Lhamo can be seen smiling down from the moon. As for the magic *phops*, for all we know, they may well be with her to this day.



# A Tale of Two Snakes



Once, upon a river-bank there dwelt two snakes. It was said they were the largest and the most feared snakes in the whole valley. The snakes lived in a dark and dismal cavern on the bank of the Mo Chhu, the Mother River. The long dark tunnel which led to the cave lay close to the Punakha Dzong, a fortress built at a point where the two rivers, the Pho Chhu and the Mo Chhu, the Father and the Mother Rivers, met.

Year in and year out the two snakes, male and female, would live in silent hibernation in the darkness of their cave. Only when the waters of the Mo Chhu became turbulent, it was said, did the snakes emerge. However, even this was only hearsay; no one had actually seen the snakes. Nevertheless, they did exist.

One day, as they lay coiled in deep slumber, the female was aroused by the monotonous drone of human voices: one was sharp and clear, and the other soft and low. Drowsily she listened, for her mind and body had not yet fully awakened from slumber.

The one with the sharp and clear tone of voice spoke of a snake, the largest ever seen in the Punakha Valley. This snake, the voice continued, lived in the Adu Tsho, a lake. Those who had seen her said she was so immense that she occupied the entire lake, and that her head and part of her body rose well above the water.

By now fully awake, the female snake gently nudged her mate.

'Wake up,' she hissed excitedly, 'and listen to what these humans have to say.'

Now the male snake, who knew all about humans had no time whatsoever for them. Had they not, time and again, killed members of the snake species as well as other members of the animal world sometimes for their flesh and skins, and at other times merely to satisfy their pride!

'Humans are not to be trusted,' he mumbled as he turned over and went to sleep again.

But sleep eluded the female long after the voices had died away. Try as she would she could not go back to sleep. Could it be true, she wondered, could there be such a snake, the largest ever seen by man? She, who had always considered herself to be the largest female snake in snakedom, now had a rival!

Surely no other snake could be as large as she! The longer she thought about it, the stronger grew her resolve to see this incredible sight for herself.

So, stealthily, she left the cave, careful not to disturb her mate. She glided down the long, dark tunnel until she found herself in the Mo Chhu which she knew led to the Adu Tsho. Swiftly and silently she swam, concealed deep within its waters, until she reached the lake.

She was filled with dismay at what she saw. The humans had not been wrong after all.

The snake which lay coiled within the lake was enormous, and its gigantic head and part of its massive body were clearly visible above the water.

The female snake shuddered; she was appalled at the sight of such immensity! Thereupon, she decided to retreat to the safety of her cave. She was soon to discover this was no easy matter. If she attempted to turn around in the river, it would cause such an upheaval in the water that the giant snake would be disturbed and she had no intention of inviting trouble.

Afraid and unsure of herself, with no one to guide her, she backed slowly down the river. Of a sudden, it dawned on her that her body could be seen. This was not the Mo Chhu, it was far too shallow. Had she by some mischance found her way into some part of another river, could it be the Dang Chhu?

Greatly distressed at her predicament, she wondered what she should do. If she waited too long, she would be discovered; to escape she would have to cross the mountain that separated the Dang Chhu and the Mo Chhu rivers.

It was late spring and, unknown to her, the farmers had set fire to the grass, dry leaves and twigs of the forest to prepare the ground for sowing. The hot embers, which would later be tilled into the soil, lay smouldering on the ground.

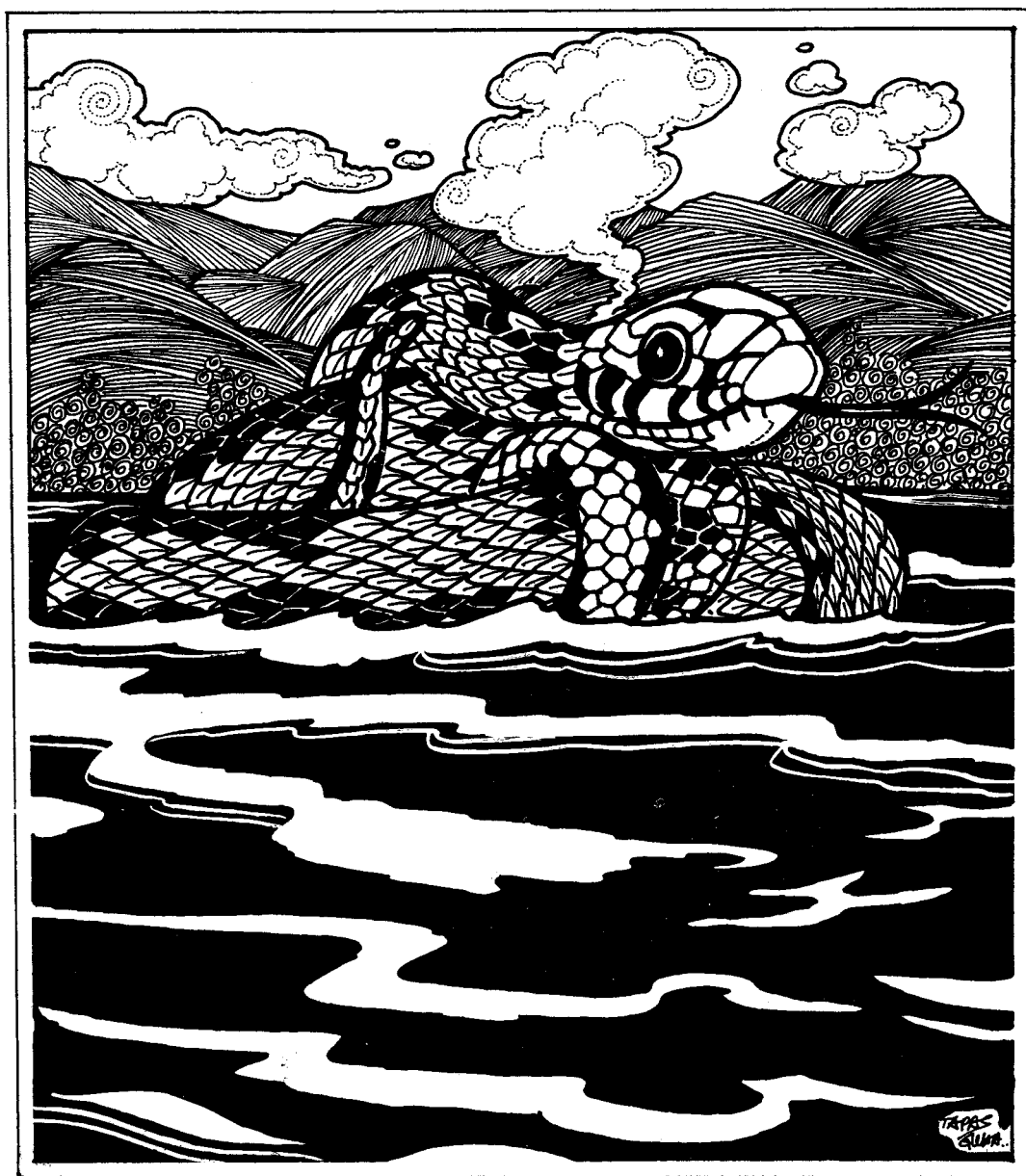
Too late! As the female snake left the shallow river, she realized to her horror that she was entrapped on a burning mountain. Her long gleaming body shrivelled with the intense heat, turned to ashes and soon mingled with the earth.

Meanwhile, the male snake waited anxiously for his mate's return. He marvelled at the folly of the female that had led her away from the safety of the cave. Unaware of the course of events, he was certain she would return one day. For was this not her home? Where else would she go?

For a while he fretted and waited. At last he coiled into himself more tightly and slept in quiet hibernation within the darkness of the cave.

Years later, in the extreme southern plains, in a place called Pasakha, a baby girl was born into a noble family. She was very beautiful, with skin as lovely as the lotus bloom. And so she was named Pema Khando, which means Lotus Fairy.

Pema Khando brought her parents great joy, for she was a sweet and charming child. But when she was about three years old, her mother noticed that she



The snake was enormous.

would suddenly stop in the midst of play and say, 'I want to go back home, my husband is waiting for me.'

Her mother who thought it was a game tried to humour her by saying, 'Where is your home, little fairy?'

'At Punakha,' would come the reply. 'He is waiting for me, he does not know what has become of me.'

After a time, no one paid much heed to what she said. But when her fantasies increased her father became uneasy. He decided to consult the head lama, in a nearby monastery.

'There is nothing to fear, these things sometimes happen,' consoled the lama. 'In time she will forget.'

But the little maid did not forget. Much against the wishes of her parents, she would stand by the roadside and anxiously question any passer-by for news of Punakha.

One day, to her great delight, a traveller from Punakha stopped to speak to her.

'Tell me,' she begged, 'will you be returning to Punakha soon?'

'Within a few days,' he replied.

'Would you be so good as to deliver a gift to my husband, a small packet of *gobrum mup*, jaggery. He does so enjoy it.'

'There is a message I wish to send him,' she said. 'It is more important than the gift. Tell him I could not return home because of the forest fire. He will understand. Tell him,' she continued, 'that I am now very happy in my new home.'

'How will I know him?' enquired the traveller. 'And who should I say sent the gift?'

'I cannot give any explanations,' protested the young maiden. 'Do as I say, he will know who sent it. Listen carefully. On the bank of the Mo Chhu there is a tunnel not far from the *dzong*. Place this gift at the mouth of the tunnel, and whisper the message which I have just given you. Then go away as fast as you can. You must promise me that you will not look back.'

The traveller agreed to this unusual request and went on his way, with the promise that he would collect the gift on his return. He would also somehow let her know when he had delivered it.

On his arrival in Punakha, the traveller did as he was directed. He found the tunnel on the bank of the Mo Chhu, left the gift at the entrance of the hole and whispered the message as he was bidden. He remembered his promise as he was about to leave, then hesitated.

'What sort of man or beast is wedded to this lovely maiden,' he wondered. 'I must see for myself before I leave.'

So he climbed a willow tree which hung over the bank of the river, and hid in its thick foliage. He watched and waited.

Suddenly, to his amazement, the gigantic head of a snake appeared at the entrance of the tunnel, grasped the packet in its cavernous mouth and slid back out of sight.

The traveller, thoroughly frightened, hurried to the house of a close friend to whom he related the story of the little maiden, and described what he had seen on the bank of the river.

Keep away from the tunnel, Jigme,' he warned. 'It is accursed. And do not repeat what I have told you to anyone.'

That night the traveller fell violently ill. And three days later he was dead.

Jigme Thinley, in whom he had confided, was deeply grieved. But in no way did he connect the snake with the death of his dear friend.

Nevertheless, he wanted to see if there was any truth in the story he had heard. So he decided to go to the place where the tunnel was supposed to be. To his surprise it was exactly as his friend had described it. And there on the bank of the Mo Chhu lay the *gobrum mup*, which had spilt out of the packet, and a thin trail of it leading to the tunnel. It was then that the realization dawned on him of the relation between the snake and the young maiden.

Fearing that he, too, would be cursed for being curious, he hurried back home, and vowed never to reveal the snakes' secret to anyone as long as he lived. But when he was old he often told his grandchildren a tale of two snakes who remained ever faithful to one another.

# The King with Ass's Ears



Once upon a time there was a king of a small kingdom. He was not a very important king, as kings go, nevertheless he *was* a king.

Now His Majesty, King Tshewang, had a secret. No one in the kingdom knew what it was, not even the queen. The few loved ones who *had* known, had long since passed away.

The secret was that the king had been born with the ears of an ass! To some this may not seem so extraordinary, but to a person such as the king, who was extremely sensitive, it was a matter of great concern.

Those two, long, hairy monstrosities which protruded from either side of his head had to be concealed even in childhood; which they were, artfully hidden beneath beautifully embroidered caps. Later, the smaller caps were replaced by even larger ones, intricately woven with gold and silver thread. And when King Tshewang ascended the throne, the royal crown was re-made and enlarged to slip over the tall cap which hid his ears.

There were many among the courtiers who wished to gain favour with the king. So they, too, with feigned respect went around with simple replicas of similar caps on their heads. King Tshewang ignored such behaviour with the disdain it deserved. For, if he had tried to put an end to such obvious mimicry, it would have aroused comment.

It must be remembered that His Majesty, the king, was otherwise a perfectly normal young man. He enjoyed, in moderation, all the pleasures of youth. He hunted and participated in all manner of games with equal enthusiasm. The only sport denied him, much to his regret, was swimming.

For, in order to learn even the first principles of that aquatic sport, he would have had to immerse himself in water. And he would have undoubtedly looked ludicrous if he had ventured into the water without his cap upon his head: and equally so if he had ventured in with it on.

One hot summer's day, the king was filled with a great desire to submerge himself in the cool and tempting waters of the Kulong Chhu, which flowed past his palace. So, accompanied by one of his favourite attendants, he went down to the river.



And lo and behold, His Majesty's head lay bare!

As they approached the sparkling water, His Majesty turned to his attendant and said, 'Get behind those bushes, Thopa, and keep your eyes tightly closed, or else . . .'

Thopa knew only too well what the words 'or else' meant. Time and again those who disobeyed the king had disappeared, never to be seen again. The terrified Thopa scurried behind the bushes and waited with his eyes tightly closed.

King Tshewang disrobed, removed his crown but not his cap. The latter, by now, had become so much a part of him that he felt to remove it would be like exposing his very soul. So he kept it on his head and stepped into the water. The king was gloriously happy! What could be more wonderful, thought he, than to be out in the open, away from prying eyes, in this delightfully refreshing river. So he leaped and splashed and sang joyously in the shallow water, oblivious of the fact that the shadows had lengthened with the setting of the sun.

Suddenly, a crow on its journey home gave a loud 'caw caw', then swooped down and triumphantly snatched the cap off the king's royal head. Crows, as you know, have a nasty habit of picking up things as they fly past, perhaps to line their scraggy nests.

And lo and behold, His Majesty's head lay bare!

The king screamed, and Thopa, tired and overcome by the gnawing pangs of hunger, for he had not eaten since early morning, parted the bushes at the exact moment when the king happened to be facing his way.

'Traitor,' roared His Majesty, 'I'll cut off your head! Give me my robes and begone!'

The poor unfortunate creature, appalled at what he had seen, hurried to obey his master's command.

Then King Tshewang, clothed once more in his royal attire, wrapped his silken vest neatly around his head. And, with the golden crown balanced precariously on top, he walked, with as much dignity as he could muster, into the palace grounds. The royal guards, if they noticed anything amiss, looked the other way.

Secure once more in the privacy of his bed-chamber, the king removed the offending silken vest and replaced it with his cap and crown. Then, with confidence he summoned his erring attendant, Thopa.

The trembling wretch entered and prostrated himself, as was the custom, at his master's feet, and awaited the dreaded proclamation.

'So now you know my secret,' said His Majesty. 'What do you suggest should be done with you?'

'Spare me, sire,' cried the unhappy man. 'I meant no harm. Forgive me, Lord, I will never tell a soul what I have seen.'

The king, who was fond of his lowly subject, was not as hard-hearted as he appeared to be. The stern countenance which masked his features was, in reality, a guard against his physical deformity.



'Granted,' he said graciously, 'I will show mercy provided the secret remains with you. If I hear that you have so much as breathed a word of what you have seen this day, I will chop off your head!'

Thopa, scared out of his wits, took refuge for the night in the mountains, where he wandered alone with only the birds and beasts of the forest to keep him company. Early next morning as he sat huddled on the branch of a tree, where he had taken shelter for the night, he saw at its foot a rat's hole.

'Ah!' he cried, as he clambered down. 'This gives me an idea. I know His Majesty has forbidden me to tell anyone his secret. But I can no longer keep silent; the secret weighs heavy on my heart. Sometimes I cannot even breathe for fear I will repeat it. I know what I will do, I will tell it to the rat's hole! Ha, ha, ha, this is a joke! His Majesty will never come to know, and I will be free of this burden.'

'Listen hole,' he shouted at the top of his voice, 'King Tshewang has the ears of an ass!'

Delighted with himself he repeated again and again, 'King', 'Ass', 'King', 'Ass', 'King', 'Ass'.

And the echo from the hole came loud and clear, 'King', 'Ass'.

Just then the wind which had been gathering force as it came up the valley, whistled as it whirled through the trees. It picked up the echo and whisked it away.

Thopa, terrified by the sound and the ferocity of the wind, scuttled still further into the depths of the forest to hide himself.

Meanwhile, the wind sped higher up the mountain until it came to the cottage of a woodcutter and his wife. The old couple were resting outside their cottage after a hard day's work when they heard the wind tearing through the trees.

'Why is the wind in such a hurry?' asked the woodcutter.

'Perhaps it has something to tell us,' said his wife.

'Whoo-hoo, whoo-hoo,' howled the wind as it repeated the echo and whirled away.

'Did you hear what the wind had to say?' said the shocked woodcutter, 'It said that our king has the ears of an ass!'

'Yes, I heard it,' replied his wife. 'We must tell our son as soon as he returns. He will be most offended to hear such a rumour about his beloved master.'

The old couple waited impatiently for the arrival of their only son who was a gardener in the royal park. They could scarcely contain themselves and shouted as he entered the cottage, 'The king has the ears of an ass, so we've been told.'

The gardener who had the utmost reverence for His Majesty, was greatly distressed to hear such a vicious rumour about his master.

'This is unbelievable,' he cried, 'I must warn His Majesty before this rumour is spread any further.' Then, begging the old couple not to repeat what they had heard, he hurried down the mountain.

At the palace, the gardener requested a private audience with the king. The astounded courtiers debated among themselves: Why would a humble gardener wish to see the king? Why is he being so secretive? Why can't he tell us?

He must have an ulterior motive, they all agreed.

But the king, when he heard of the request, was puzzled. Never before had a menial attempted to approach him. His curiosity was aroused.

'Bring the gardener in,' he ordered, 'and leave us in peace.'

Alone in the council-chamber, in the presence of His Most Excellent Majesty, the gardener prostrated himself.

'Why do you wish to see me?' enquired the king.

'Lord,' said the gardener, without raising his head, 'I have heard a rumour of which I am ashamed to speak.'

'What could be so dreadful that it does not bear mention?' asked the king. 'Speak!'

'It fills me with shame, sire, even as I repeat it. Forgive me, Lord, it is rumoured that you have the ears of an ass.'

For years King Tshewang had dreaded just such a moment. The secret was finally out! First the secret had remained safe with him. Then Thopa came to know of it. And now the gardener. How had he come to know? Had not Thopa been sworn to secrecy on fear of death?

Quelling all the conflicting emotions this discovery had aroused: fear of shame, ridicule, and above all of the censure of his beloved queen, he turned to the prone figure.

'Where did you hear this unpardonable piece of gossip?' he roared.

'Forgive me, sire,' pleaded the gardener, who until now had not raised his head for fear of His Majesty's wrath. 'It was told to me by my parents. My father is a woodcutter, he may have heard it in the forest.'

'We shall soon know,' said the king.

So the palace guards were summoned and despatched in search of the woodcutter and his wife.

The old couple were soon found and ushered into the royal palace. Never in their lives had these simple people seen such magnificence. They were so dazzled by the splendour that they ceased to wonder as to why His Majesty, the king, had sent for them.

But once within the council-chamber, at the sight of their son prostrate on the floor, they both gave vent to their fears. The old woman moaned aloud, while the old man beat his head upon the floor. 'He is dead,' they both wailed.

'Silence!' thundered the king. 'You, gardener, arise.'

Then turning to the old couple, 'Now tell me, where did you hear this ridiculous nonsense about my ears?'

'From the wind,' said the old man.

'From the wind,' said the old woman.

King Tshewang shook his head in disbelief.

The old woman persisted, 'Yes, sire, it was the wind. The wind heard it in the forest and told us. Please, sire, spare our son, he meant no harm.'

'I will get to the truth of the matter,' said His Majesty. 'Now, go, all three of you. Out of my sight!'

'And as for you,' he pointed to the gardener as they were leaving. 'If I hear any more such rumours, you will be the first to lose your head.'

The following day King Tshewang went unaccompanied up the mountain. As he neared the summit he heard the howl of the wind as it rushed through the valley.

'Tell me, wind,' he shouted, 'from where did you learn my secret?'

'Ha, ha, ha,' laughed the wind. 'I heard the echo from a rat's hole. Is that why you are here, Your Majesty? But rest assured, I will never again repeat your secret. Am I not one of your subjects, too, sire?' and with this, the wind, perhaps the only one of His Majesty's subjects who could afford to take liberties with the king, laughed as it sped swiftly on its way.

It seems my secret was never really betrayed, reflected King Tshewang. Yet Thopa deserves to be taught a lesson. So when he returned to the palace he sent for the unwitting attendant.

Thopa, confident that the summons had nothing to do with the king's secret, wondered why he had been sent for.

'Do you know Thopa,' asked the king coming straight to the point, 'that the wind too, can hear?'

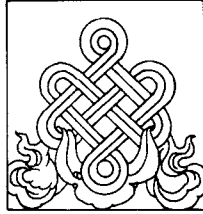
Now Thopa, who knew nothing about the part the wind had played in carrying the message, could not understand what the king was talking about. Kings being kings, he reasoned, whatever they said would have to appear to make sense, so he nodded his head in agreement.

'Never, never, repeat something, thinking no one will hear,' continued the king. 'The wind can spread a rumour faster than you think. What you deserve is a fitting punishment. Let me see . . . I know, I will banish you from my kingdom for hmm . . . nine hundred and ninety-nine years. That should teach you a lesson. Begone!'

And so Thopa was banished from the kingdom. No one knows if he survived those nine hundred and ninety-nine years, for he was never heard of again.

As for King Tshewang, he kept his secret well hidden for as long as he lived. Nobody, not even the queen, whom he loved dearly, ever came to know that His Royal Majesty had been born with the ears of an ass.

# The Magic Crowns



Far north, at the foot of the snow-covered mountains, there was a holy lake. It was believed that hidden treasures lay within its crystal depths. This was probably true, because the lake was closely guarded by two gigantic frogs, a male and a female. The male wore an ornate golden crown upon his head; and the female, a crown of gold adorned with sparkling jewels.

The holy lake fell within the realm of King Phodrang Abchhen: the largest and most powerful kingdom in the northern country. The lesser kings were dependent upon King Phodrang Abchhen's benevolence, since it was in his kingdom that the lake lay.

However, King Phodrang Abchhen was himself at the mercy of the guardians of the lake—the frogs that stopped the flow of the water altogether if their demands were not satisfied. Their demands were by no means small, either, for it became traditional for them to demand that every *Losar*, Bhutanese New Year, a male child born in the Year of the Tiger be sacrificed at the holy lake. Therefore, every year, each kingdom, by turn, offered the sacrifice without protest—until, one year, no male child born in the Year of the Tiger was to be found in any of the kingdoms.

King Phodrang Abchhen summoned his council of ministers, and the discussion continued far into the night. But no decision was reached as to who was to appease the frogs.

Then the youngest minister spoke, 'Your Majesty, it is well known that Prince Tsering Ngodup is the only one left who qualifies.'

Fear gripped the king's heart as he thought of his only son and heir, a mere lad of fourteen, who would be sacrificed if no one else was found. He turned to the young minister and rasped, 'Since when have the sons of kings been included in this ritual?'

The young man replied boldly, 'So far the need has never arisen, Your Majesty.'

In desperation King Phodrang Abchhen ordered the search to continue throughout the neighbouring kingdoms, but without success. Eventually, the

king broke the tragic news gently to his son. The boy's calm reaction took the king by surprise.

'There is so little time left, I must say goodbye to Tashi Dhondup,' said the prince. He went immediately to the house of the minister, Dorji Wangdu, whose son Tashi Dhondup and he had studied and played together since childhood.

If Tashi Dhondup was shocked by what he was told, he tried to hide his feelings. 'Let us take a long walk and think things out, like we've always done,' he suggested.

So the two friends walked and walked, revisiting their favourite haunts, until they arrived at a forest where they had often played together. As they sat silently beneath the shade of a tree, suddenly from above them came the cawing of a crow.

'Ka, Ka, Ka,' he crowed. The cry was repeated, 'Ka, Ka, Ka.'

'Listen,' cried Tashi Dhondup excitedly, 'this crow has something to tell us.'

They looked up into the branches and saw a big black crow. The crow looked down at them wisely.

'You,' cawed the crow, as he cocked his head towards the prince, 'were born in the Year of the Tiger. Your father is deeply distressed because you will be sacrificed on the night of *Losar*.'

'Yes, that is true,' agreed Prince Tsering Ngodup.

'I will tell you a secret,' said the crow. 'The power of the frogs lies in the crowns they wear. Those crowns are enchanted. If you hit the frogs on their heads, they will lose those crowns and die.' Giving this advice, the crow flew away.

The friends stared at one another in disbelief.

'Do you think what the crow said is true?' queried the prince.

'It is a chance we have to take,' replied Tashi Dhondup. 'At least we can try and get those crowns.'

As *Losar* approached, King Phodrang Abchhen tried in vain to conceal his grief. The boy tried to console him, 'There is nothing to fear, father. Trust me.'

\* \* \*

On New Year's day, crowds gathered at the lake to pay homage to the frogs, the guardians of the lake. Prayers were said and offerings of flowers and fruit were thrown into the water. Towards evening, the crowds hurriedly departed as it was considered inauspicious to be seen by the guardians of the lake.

Meanwhile, the two young boys prepared for the sacrificial rites. Draped in plain white silk, barefooted and unescorted, they left for the holy lake. On the way they armed themselves with stout staffs, and crept stealthily towards the shores of the lake.

The new moon had risen, a thin silvery arc in the sky, welcoming the *Losar*. In the gathering dusk, the two boys could barely distinguish the gigantic forms of



'It is just as well they do not know!'

the two frogs seated on a large rock close to the shore. Silently they crept behind the rock and waited.

'It is such a pity that the young prince has to die,' they heard the male frog croak. 'I would rather it was one of those greedy subjects from any of the kingdoms. Have you noticed how they come every *Losar*, and look longingly at the lake, hoping that by some miracle they will find the hidden treasure? If they only knew that a hit on the head of the wearer of either of our magic crowns would make them possessors of untold wealth, our lives would not be safe.'

'It is just as well they do not know,' said the female frog. 'Today I overheard someone say that the young prince's friend had decided to join him. Now there are two of them. We have never been so fortunate before.'

At that moment, the two young boys gave piercing screams and attacked the frogs with their staffs. Prince Tsering Ngodup caught the golden crown before the male frog fell into the lake, and Tashi Dhondup grasped the crown with the jewels as the female frog sank into the water.

'Now we can return to the palace. My father will be pleased,' cried the prince.

'It is not safe for us to return just yet,' said his cautious friend, 'everyone will think our spirits have returned to haunt them. Let us stay away from the palace for some time.'

So Tashi Dhondup and the prince wandered southwards until they came to an unknown kingdom. They saw an inn by the roadside where they decided to stop for the night. The inn, they discovered, belonged to a widow and her daughter.

'May we stay here for the night?' requested Prince Tsering Ngodup.

The widow was surprised at the unexpected appearance of the two young boys, strangely attired in white silk, with crowns on their heads. 'They must be rich,' thought the widow. 'Before they leave the inn we must relieve them of their wealth.'

'You are welcome to stay as long as you please,' she replied as she eyed their golden crowns. 'The payment is the same for all travellers.'

'Now what do we do for money?' Tashi Dhondup wanted to know when the two friends were alone in their room.

'Hit me on the head,' cried the prince. 'We will soon know if those frogs were telling the truth.'

The moment Tashi Dhondup hit his friend on the head, the prince began to spew golden coins out of his mouth. And when the astonished Prince Tsering Ngodup hit Tashi Dhondup, the latter spewed precious jewels.

'Now we can pay the old widow,' laughed the prince. 'But first we must send for some new clothes.'

The widow and her daughter were extremely pleased when the boys gave them gold coins to buy clothes for them. The greedy pair planned, on their way

to the market, how they would make a profit on buying the new clothes; and later rob the two boys of the rest of their gold.

That evening the prince and his friend were given a sumptuous meal followed by *chhang*. The *chhang* was served again and again, until the two boys became drowsy and fell asleep. When they awoke, they found themselves outside the inn. It was a cold, dark night. They realized the treachery of the two women, but considered it a stroke of good luck that their crowns had not been removed.

There was no way the boys could get into the inn. It was late, so they decided to look for a *gompa*, where they could stay. They had given up all hope of finding a place when they saw a single light in a window; to their joy it was a small *gompa*. There was no response to their frantic knocking. Then Tashi Dhondup peeped through a chink in the solid wooden door and was amazed at what he saw.

An ancient lama removed a *khadhar* from behind a statue and spread it carefully on the floor of the prayer room. Then he lay on it, rolled first to the left, and then to the right; and he turned into a donkey. The donkey brayed, ran twice around the room, lay down once more on the *khadhar*. Then he rolled to the right and the left, and was back in his original form. The lama chuckled away, as if he thoroughly enjoyed the joke. Then he put the *khadhar* back behind the statue and left the room.

Breathlessly Tashi Dhondup described what he had seen. 'Here is our chance to teach those two women a lesson,' he cried.

So the two young friends decided to take the *khadhar* back with them to the inn. They stole quietly into the prayer room and removed it from behind the statue.

The next morning, Prince Tsering Ngodup and Tashi Dhondup presented themselves at the inn. Both the widow and her daughter pretended they were delighted to see them. They treated them with great hospitality. Then the widow asked them how they had so much money when they had arrived empty-handed.

Tashi Dhondup laid the *khadhar* on the floor and explained that it was enchanted.

'Try it,' suggested Prince Tsering Ngodup, 'both of you lie on it, then roll to the left and to the right. You will see for yourselves what happens.'

The mother and the daughter were excited. They lay down on the *khadhar*, then turned to the left and to the right as they were instructed.

And lo and behold! They were transformed into donkeys. The donkeys obediently followed their masters into the yard where the other animals were kept.

The following day a traveller stopped at the inn. He told the two friends that a palace was being built in the kingdom for the new king and that donkeys were needed to transport material.

Here was an opportunity to put the two beasts to honest labour, the friends



decided. So Prince Tsering Ngodup and Tashi Dhondup set off comfortably astride the donkeys to meet King Kapdung.

The king granted their request and the donkeys were put to work transporting mud and stones for the new palace. Then, satisfied that they had had their revenge, the two friends departed.

Three years passed and the palace that was being built for King Kapdung was not finished. More workmen were employed, but the number of donkeys was not increased. Besides, the builder was a hard taskmaster and he beat the wretched animals severely if they stopped to rest or faltered on the way.

One day, the king arrived at the palace to see how the work was progressing. As the two donkeys passed him they hee-hawed loudly and began to cry. King Kapdung was amazed to see tears roll down their faces. He sent for the builder and enquired as to who owned the donkeys. He was even more amazed when two young men were brought before him, both wearing golden crowns.

'Are these animals yours?' asked the king curiously. 'And why do they cry so piteously when they pass me?'

Prince Tsering Ngodup explained how they had been robbed by the widow and her daughter; and how he and his friend had avenged themselves.

King Kapdung, who was a kind-hearted man, insisted it was time the two women were forgiven. So the young men placed the *khadhar* on the ground and made the donkeys roll on it from right to left. And once more they were changed into their former selves. They ran off in haste and were never heard of again.

As for Prince Tsering Ngodup and Tashi Dhondup, they decided to return to their own country. They took leave of King Kapdung and went first to the *gompa* from where they had taken the *khadhar*. The old lama was so overjoyed at the sight of his magic plaything that he completely forgot to ask the two young men how they had come by it.

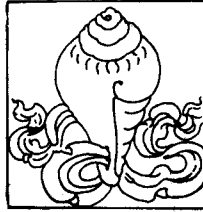
In the meantime, neither King Phodrang Abchhen, nor his minister cherished the hope of ever seeing his son again. When it was learned that two young men, wearing golden crowns, wished to see the king, he hesitantly sent for them, never dreaming that one of them could be his son.

Imagine his astonishment when a voice cried, 'Father,' and his son rushed into his arms! The fathers and the sons were reunited; and the lost years rolled away as the two young men described all that had taken place.

And when Prince Tsering Ngodup spoke of the enchanted crowns, the king silenced him. 'We have no need of such things,' he protested. 'The water from the lake flows freely now, and all the kingdoms are flourishing. Throw the crowns back into the lake where they belong.'

The two young men took the golden crowns and threw them into the centre of the holy lake, where they lie with the other hidden treasures, perhaps to this day.

# The Cloud Fairies to the Rescue



King Lam Nagseng was very angry. He was angry with his daughter, Princess Meto Sedan. And the reason for his anger was that he had learned only that morning that she refused to consider the proposals of the suitors who sought her hand in marriage.

He stared sternly at her as she walked into his chamber and bowed before him. She had such sublime beauty and wisdom, yet she was barely fifteen years old. He did not have the heart to reprimand her. Nevertheless, he considered it his duty, as a father, to guide her in matters pertaining to matrimony.

‘What is this, I hear?’ his tone softened, for he loved his only child. ‘Princes have come from far and near laden with gifts of gold, precious jewels, silks and brocades. They seek your hand in marriage, and you have refused each one of them.’

Princess Meto Sedan raised her lovely eyes and said softly, ‘Father, for years I have studied the doctrines of our Lord Buddha under the guidance of our revered Lama Lhanangpa, and I have made my decision. I wish to be an *anim*, a nun, and spread the teachings of our Master.’

Under the circumstances there was nothing King Lam Nagseng could say. It was considered a great honour for a child of any family to join the holy order. But, he reasoned, the only daughter of a king, it was unthinkable!

‘I will see you later, you may go!’ He was deeply worried.

That night the princess had a dream. She dreamt she was climbing a mountain; it was a bright and sunny day. Of a sudden, the sun turned dark and a thick fog enveloped her. She stood terrified, rooted to the spot. Then the fog vanished as swiftly as it had come; and the sun shone once again.

As she continued her climb, the sun disappeared and the moon rose with a silvery light. Then the moon changed into a burning red ball of fire; and back again it went from red to white. She screamed with terror for it was suddenly dark, and with the darkness a yelling of demons filled the air. The princess ran down the mountain; but the faster she ran, the faster ran the demons behind her. Then they were upon her, clawing at her face with their long beastly talons. They

vanished and the dream ended. But Princess Meto Sedan was greatly disturbed; she feared the significance of the dream.

The next day she narrated her dream to her mother, Queen Lhamo Dolma. The queen repeated what she was told to the king. And the king decided that the wise Lama Lhanangpa should be consulted.

They all met without delay in the council chamber: the king, the queen, the princess, a few of the councillors who held the king's confidence, and Lama Lhanangpa.

The lama listened attentively while the princess described her dream. Then he closed his eyes, and in a slow, monotonous tone, as if in a trance, he began to speak.

'The Princess Meto Sedan's life is filled with sorrow. She will marry the husband of her choice, but he will be neither good nor kind to her. The only peace she will find will be in the pursuit of religious studies. Eventually she will be forced to leave the kingdom. And then she will find deliverance from this earthly bondage.'

The king and queen were stunned. Then they were filled with remorse at the thought that their daughter would have to endure so much suffering.

'Is there nothing we can do to prevent such a disaster?' questioned the distraught father.

The lama was silent for a while, then he replied, 'I have told you what I see. Your daughter must fulfil her destiny.'

'Perhaps we should consult the oracle,' suggested the queen.

'No matter whom you ask, the answer will be the same,' he replied.

Day by day the father and mother grew more and more despondent, but they no longer tried to impose their will upon their child. It troubled Princess Meto Sedan to watch her parents suffer on her account. So finally, she expressed her desire to be married.

At first, King Lam Nagseng and Queen Lhamo Dolma were apprehensive. Then they decided they would have perpetual prayers said at the palace *lhakhang*, for the well-being of their daughter. Hundreds of monks were also invited to recite from the holy texts days before the marriage was to take place.

The wedding was celebrated amidst much pomp and splendour. And the bride departed for her new home with the husband she had selected, King Dawa Norbu of Ta Fung, Tibet.

Queen Meto Sedan soon adjusted to the new life and, when she was free of her duties in the palace, she sought the guidance of learned lamas, and continued with her religious studies.

The days, the months and the years passed, and the young queen was content. But not so the king her husband; he watched with growing impatience the



As she fell the cloud fairies caught her and flew with her into the sky.

complacency of his wife. Until, one day, he sent for her and, in the presence of his councillors, said, 'Seven years have passed and you are still childless. I have no heir. Tomorrow, before daybreak you must leave my kingdom.'

The news soon spread that the queen had been banished. At dawn, a strangely silent crowd gathered at the palace gates to bid her farewell. And as Queen Meto Sedan appeared, followed by her maid, Yang Genma, some of the crowd bowed low, while others wept softly. Then, as the two departed, a mournful cry arose from the throng.

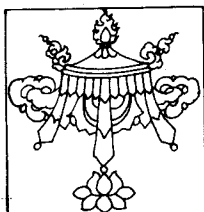
Queen Meto Sedan and her companion set off with a heavy heart along a rough forsaken road. They walked wearily until they arrived at the foot of a high mountain whose lower slopes were covered by a thick forest. Skirting the forest, they marvelled at the sight of the river which cascaded down the mountain and hurtled into the ravine below.

'We must part here,' said the young queen to her maidservant. 'You must return to the palace, Yang Genma, the new queen will take good care of you if you serve her well. There is nothing left for me in this world. I have finally found what I was looking for.'

Then, before Yang Genma could protest, a wonderful thing happened; myriads of beautiful blossoms fell from the heavens, and, as they fell, a rainbow appeared in the sky. And on the rainbow danced the ethereal cloud fairies, or sky travellers, spiritual guides, who were to escort her to *lhayul*, to heaven.

Meto Sedan's face glowed with a mystic radiance as she dived into the river. Then as she fell the cloud fairies caught her and flew away with her far into the sky until they were lost from sight for ever.

# The Burning Lake



Several hundred years ago, in the year of the Iron Male Horse according to the Bhutanese calendar, a son was born to Dhondrup of the Nyo family and a herdsman Pema Droloma, of the village of Lungla Kchel in the Chhoekhor district in Bumthang.

The child, Pemalingpa with his dwarf-like body was a great disappointment to his mother. 'Whatever will become of him?' she wondered.

In childhood the boy remained aloof and withdrawn and was reluctant to mix with other children. When he was three years old, he repeatedly spoke of himself as an incarnation of Guru Padmasambhava of Nalanda, but little attention was paid to what he said.

When still young Pemalingpa was apprenticed to the village blacksmith. At the forge he began to fashion swords and coats of mail with such dexterity that he soon had the reputation of being the most skilled artisan in the valley. However, wielding the heavy hammer so developed his arms and shoulders that, with his dwarf-like stature, he began to look more ludicrous than ever.

The village children never ceased to tease him as he passed them on his way to the forge.

'*Mi-chhung! mi-chhung!*' they would shout. But Pemalingpa accustomed to the snide remarks of his elders would take their banter good-naturedly.

One day when Pemalingpa had reached the age of twenty-seven, he went into the forest far beyond the village in search of mushrooms. They were usually to be found in abundance at that time of the year, but on that particular day he was unable to find a single one. Disappointed, he decided to return home. On the way back he was surprised to see an old hermit with a long white beard in the forest.

Pemalingpa bowed reverently before the old sage saying, 'Your Holiness, I would have requested you to honour my house, but unfortunately I cannot offer you suitable hospitality. I planned to cook mushrooms today, but I cannot find any.'

The old hermit smilingly acknowledged the young blacksmith's greeting. Then

to Pemalingpa's astonishment he parted some leaves and twigs on the ground exposing a bed of the choicest mushrooms.

Together they returned to the hut where Pemalingpa lived. On the way the old man pressed a small scroll into Pemalingpa's hand, suggesting he read it when the day's work was done. The young man placed the roll of paper carefully within the upper folds of his *gho*, neglecting to tell the sage that he could neither read nor write. When they arrived at the hut Pemalingpa busied himself preparing a delicious meal of mushrooms; their fragrance filled the air. But when the meal was ready Pemalingpa found to his astonishment that the old man had disappeared.

Disappointed that his revered guest had left so suddenly, Pemalingpa sat down to a solitary meal. When he had finished eating, he climbed to the roof of his hut to muse over the strange encounter with the old sage. Suddenly he remembered the scroll which the old man had given him. He took it out of his *gho* and stared uncomprehendingly at the strange script on the paper. He had never learned to read, but the contents of the scroll were suddenly revealed to him: go to Mem-ber Tsho, the Burning Lake, and there you will find the casket containing the immortal scriptures of knowledge and wisdom of Lord Buddha. He realized that the hermit was none other than a manifestation of Guru Padmasambhava, and that he, Pemalingpa was the *terton*, who according to prophecy would discover the *terma*, treasure.

Now the Burning Lake lay in the dense highland forests of Bumthang. It was avoided by the superstitious villagers because there were those who reported having seen *karmi*, sacred lights, flickering on its surface. So, by the light of the full moon, Pemalingpa, followed only by a small group of relatives, went to the Burning Lake. There, as he stood on the shore he wondered what he should do.

Suddenly the sound of the wind as it whistled through the trees, grew louder and louder, and he found himself propelled towards the water. Down he went, down, down into the depths of the lake until he found himself standing before the open door of a *lhakhang*. The temple was guarded by a toothless old woman. She told him that Guru Padmasambhava had left for him a small casket. With a long claw-like hand she beckoned and he followed her into the *lhakhang*. Its floor was strewn with gold and sparkling jewels, but Pemalingpa only had eyes for the beautiful carved wooden casket on the altar. He took it tenderly in his hands and smiled at the old woman as he went out.

He had found the spiritual treasure, yet he was afraid, for the full realization of his spiritual power had not yet dawned on him. He did not know how he would return to the surface of the lake.

Then a strange thing happened, once again he heard the sound of the wind as it descended to the depths of the lake, and he found himself driven upwards with the force of the wind. Not a word was uttered by those who watched with awe as



He took it tenderly in his hands.



he stepped on to the lake shore. In silence they all returned home. But as they went past a small *gompa*, Pemalingpa slipped quietly in and there he remained.

Having discovered the *terma*, Pemalingpa did not know how to preach the spiritual message of the scriptures contained in the casket. In the confines of the small grotto he prayed silently, invoking the blessings of his spiritual father. While praying he fell into a trance, and in a vision he saw the 'ethereal cloud-fairies' who revealed to him the principles of all religions and the language of the sacred scriptures. On awakening he opened the casket and discovered that it was filled with small scrolls on which in 'fairy script', the teachings of Lord Buddha were written.

The next day Pemalingpa began to preach to a mighty throng. And those who gathered round him were struck with wonder, for while he spoke myriads of fragrant flowers fell from the sky, disappearing before they touched the earth; and 'cloud-fairies' danced on the rainbows.

Now an evil chieftain, the Deb of Chhoekhor, heard of the treasure casket that Pemalingpa had brought out of the Burning Lake. He was filled with envy and greed for he thought that the treasures of the lake included gold and jewels. He sent for the saintly man.

'Bring me the casket of treasure from Mem-ber Tsho!' he ordered.

In vain Pemalingpa reasoned, 'My Lord, the time is not right for worldly treasures to be brought out of the lake. The scriptures alone will reveal the truth and the light.' This only enraged the Deb further, and he forced the pious man to go with him to the Burning Lake.

A very different procession went towards the lake this time: an angry chieftain and his warriors followed by the saintly Pemalingpa and his disciples. As Pemalingpa leaped fearlessly into the water, a violent storm arose, and the turbulent waves closed over him. His disciples, many of those who had been with him when he had first brought out the casket, feared for their Master and began to pray. Soon the saintly figure emerged once again from the lake with the casket in his hands, his clothes untouched by the water. The warriors marvelling at the strange phenomenon, cowered behind their powerful ruler as Pemalingpa advanced towards him.

'Open the casket!' roared the wrathful chieftain.

'I beseech you, my lord, do not tamper with it. No good will come of this,' reasoned the saint.

But as the infuriated Deb struck the casket with his sword, splitting it in two, a spiral of smoke escaped and a loud voice was heard prophesying that nothing would remain of the evil chieftain, his kingdom or his treasures.

Shortly afterwards Deb Chhoekhor was conquered by another equally wicked

chieftain, the Hero of Ura, better known as the 'Black Devil', and the lineage of Deb Chhoeckhor became extinct.

Pemalingpa became one of the greatest teachers of Buddhism in Bhutan. It is said that the dwarf-like blacksmith vowed, when he first began his spiritual life, that he would never enter a forge again. The anvil on which he sealed his vow, still retains the small imprint of his foot. This precious relic remains enshrined at the Kunzangda monastery built high into the rocks above the place where Pemalingpa was born.

## Daktsaan, the Mountain God



Paanchen Zangmo, a lovely village maiden, had been wandering all day gathering mushrooms. High up, through the pine-clad mountains, searching for those delightful delicacies which lay hidden in the undergrowth, amongst the leaves and twigs of the forest, and on the rotting trunks of trees which were occasionally found on the ground. She felt despondent; she still did not have enough mushrooms to feed her family, let alone the guests who had been invited the following day. 'I must fill my *bangchu* before the sun sets,' she thought, as she followed the stony path up the mountain.

She paused to rest and gazed down into the valley. The solitary village in the distance seemed so small and so far away from where she stood. The rays of the setting sun touched the roofs of the village houses, whose shingles, wet with the morning's rain, glistened brightly. But high up on the mountain the sky was already darkening with clouds. Not a bird was to be seen. And the unusual silence which enveloped the forest frightened her. As she was about to retrace her steps along the path she had taken, she felt the first slight tremor of the earth. Suddenly it came again, more vibrant than before. She stopped, rooted to the ground, conscious that something indefinable was about to happen.

Then, as if by magic from the darkening shadows, from out of the very mountain, a strange, hazy, warrior-like figure emerged. He stretched his arms wide, then yawned, then stretched again, as if he had just awakened from a very deep sleep.

The village maiden, terrified by the awesome encounter, turned in panic to rush down the path she had taken.

'No, don't run away,' said a deep, gentle voice from out of the shadows. 'Don't be afraid, I won't harm you.'

'I will take you back to the village,' continued the stranger. 'Come, you will be safe with me, I promise you.'

'Who are you?' asked the girl. Although she knew she had never seen him before, she found the soft-spoken words of the youth reassuring.

'Daktsaan,' replied the stranger without further explanation.

The young maid may have wondered at the unusual name, but she made no comment.

There was no moon in the sky, and it had grown quite dark. Nevertheless, Paanchen Zangmo confidently followed the strange figure as he led the way down the mountain path, trusting that the young warrior would protect her from prowling beasts.

Silently they found their way through the darkened village. At the door of her home, the young girl stopped.

'I live here,' she whispered softly, so as not to awaken the sleeping household.

'I will visit you tomorrow,' he promised and disappeared into the night.

And so the secret courtship began. Each night, while the village slept, the young maid would quietly open the front door and her lover would slip unobserved into the house. But before daybreak he would always hurry away.

One day, overcome with curiosity, Paanchen Zangmo begged her lover, 'Tell me who you really are. You come to me when it grows dark, and you leave before dawn. I don't even know what you look like.'

'I love you, isn't that enough?' he asked as he silently disappeared once again.

For a while the secret courtship continued. It is not known if Daktsaan was aware of the beauty of his beloved. But it is certain that Paanchen Zangmo had no idea what her lover looked like, for she had never seen him by daylight. One morning, soon after the gallant warrior had left, the girl lay pondering as to how she could cajole him into revealing himself, when suddenly an idea struck her. She would follow him and discover for herself who he was and where he came from.

During the day the young maiden busied herself winding into a ball the thread she had spun for a new *kira*. When she thought the ball was large enough, she hid it under some clothes beside her mattress. Daktsaan, unaware of her trickery, had, as usual, slipped quietly into the house. At dawn, before he left, Paanchen Zangmo skilfully tied one end of the thread to his foot.

Then, keeping a safe distance, she followed him, unravelling the thread as he walked on. From time to time, so as not to lose sight of him, she followed in his wake, rolling the thread once again into a ball as she moved, but careful always to keep out of sight.

In the first grey light of dawn, before the world stirred, the anxious maiden followed the shadowy figure of her lover up the same mountain path they had traversed the first time they met.

Suddenly the thread slackened, then grew taut, and sensing that her beloved had changed direction she followed cautiously, and found to her dismay that he had entered a huge cave. The very cave which the villagers believed was the abode of demons, witches and evil spirits. No one had ever dared to enter it. But

when Daktsaan disappeared into the cave, Paanchen Zangmo, without a second thought, followed him.

The early morning light had penetrated the cavern. So one can well imagine the poor girl's horror when she discovered, not the young warrior to whom she had pledged herself, but a fearful demon dragon breathing fire. And to its hind foot was attached the thread which she had so carefully tied. She screamed in terror, and as her screams bounded back and forth from the walls of the cave, she fell into a swoon and died. The demon-god, overwhelmed with sorrow, watched helplessly over the body of his beloved night and day.

Meanwhile, in the village there were hushed whispers outside the house where the friends and relatives of Paanchen Zangmo had gathered to console the grief-stricken parents. For four days there had been no news of the young girl. Then, on the fifth day, the shepherd Namgyal came to the village with the news that, while he and his brother, Penjore, were on their way to the pastoral grounds in the mountains with their yaks, they had seen a young girl near the haunted cave. They thought she held something in her hands, it was difficult to tell what it was as she was some distance away. Then to their astonishment, the girl had disappeared inside the cave. Penjore had insisted that the villagers should be informed; so Namgyal had returned immediately.

The friends and relatives deliberated long and earnestly, but no decision was reached.

*Who was to enter the cave?*

Some of the more daring young men approached the entrance to the abode of the evil spirits, but soon retreated when the dragon-demon's piercing wail rent the air.

Finally, someone suggested that the revered lama of the noted Pemalingpa monastery in Bumthang would know what to do. A messenger was sent on horseback to fetch him. The journey was long and dangerous. The messenger had first to cross the roaring Kuru Chhu; ride through the thick mountain jungle where the ruins of the Zhongar Dzong lay hidden; then cross three difficult mountain passes, which were interspersed with valleys through which ice-covered streams flowed; then along the narrow, precipitous rock-road which skirted a mountain, and eventually to the monastery in Bumthang.

Days later, the messenger returned with the ancient lama; both exhausted from the rigorous journey. But, to everyone's surprise, the aged lama did not even pause to refresh himself, he went fearlessly into the mountain cave and sat down at the feet of the dragon-demon, who still zealously kept guard over his beloved. And there the lama remained in deep meditation.

Soon the demon was conquered, and he swore an oath that he would forever uphold the teachings of the Buddhist faith. The lama then blessed Daktsaan and



She discovered, not the young warrior, but a fearful demon dragon.

Paanchen Zangmo and transformed them into deities to stand guard at the altar of the protector deities of the Mongar Dzong.

The two deities stand guard in the *lhakhang*, the inner temple of the Mongar Dzong even to this day. They are two lifelike statues of Daktsaan, the mountain god, fully clothed in battle array; and Paanchen Zangmo, the lovely village maiden, dressed in the old traditional costume of Lho Mon, on her head a golden crown.

# Glossary



aekhu: staircase consisting of a single log of wood cut vertically in two, with ledges carved on one side

anim: Buddhist nun

Ap-Chhundu: male guardian deity of Ha; considered to be very powerful

bangchu: food container made of cane or bamboo

beulo: hat made of bamboo

chhang: local drink brewed from barley, maize, millet, potato etc.

chhangap: servant to the Deb; he cooked, served, carried messages etc.

chhen gangchi: I have wind (flatulence)

Chho-Dha: archery contest; the favourite sport of Bhutan

Chhoga: sacrificial ceremony performed yearly to appease the serpents of the lake; a male youth born in the Year of the Tiger had to be sacrificed

chhorten: stupa; originally meant to be a relic-holder; now built as a monument in memory of Lord Buddha or other saints

chhu: river or stream

chhuzom-sa: confluence of two rivers

choego: saffron robe worn by the lamas

darmtse: jackfruit

Deb: temporal ruler or administrator of a kingdom

deuth threul: cremation ground

doma: areca nut and lime wrapped in betel leaf offered in greeting

dremo: blue bear found in Laya, northern Bhutan

Drogpas: nomadic tribes of Tibetan stock who kept sheep, cows, yaks and *dzos*; in the summer months, when the snows melted, they took their herds high up into the mountains in search of green pastures

druk, drug: dragon



Druk Yul: Dragon Country; the name Druk (Drug) Yul replaced Lho Mon in the 13th century

Drukpa(s): inhabitants of Druk Yul

dzo: cross between a cow and a yak

dzong: fortress, also a religious and administrative centre

Dzongkha: national language of Bhutan

gelong: fully ordained monk

gho: kimono-like robe worn by men

gohrum mup: jaggery, thick dark brown sugar

gompa: monastery, a place where monks are housed; it may be within a dzong or separate from it

gon-pa: monastery in the Tibetan language; it means a solitary place, usually a cave and when monks collected enough money they built a monastery there

Guru Padmasambhava: an Indian ascetic from the ancient university of Nalanda, who had in the middle of the 8th century introduced Buddhism in Bhutan

gyeza: corn, maize

Je Khempo: Lord Abbot; head of the monastic order

kaira: colourful woven belt worn over the *kira* to hold it in place

kang: mountain

karmi: sacred lights seen on lakes or on water

kei-mei-tshel: flower garden

kewa ngam: sweet potato

khadhar: white silk ceremonial scarf presented on all auspicious occasions

khuju: cuckoo

kira: long robe made of silk, brocade or cotton, worn by women

la: mountain pass

lama: spiritual teacher and guide; generally abbreviated to *lam* when attached to a name

lhakhang: house of god; it is normally a central building within a dzong or monastery, or separately located at an auspicious place

lhamo: goddess

lhayul: heaven (lha: god; yul: country)

Lho Lumpa: ancient Tibetan name for Bhutan

Lho Mon: ancient name for Bhutan; lho meaning south, and mon meaning darkness

Losar: Bhutanese New Year; it usually falls in February when Lord Buddha is believed to have overcome the forces of evil

mani-beads: prayer beads  
 memja: barley  
 mi-chhung: dwarf  
 migyoe: mythical beast believed to be half-man and half-bear found in the Himalaya, possibly the *dremo*  
 Mo Chhu: female river; commonly referred to as the Mother River

Nam Drug: dragon in the sky  
 norbu: precious jewel

Om mani padme hum: prayer for the deliverance from rebirth

Penlop: governor, or civil administrator of a province  
 Pho Chhu: male river, commonly referred to as the Father River  
 phop: cup finely carved out of wood

seva chang chubb: a wild rose bush with white flowers  
 sharop: hunter  
 sonam: fortune, luck  
 suja: a Tibetan type of brick tea which is brewed and churned together with butter and salt

Ta Fung: ancient name for Tibet  
 tamasive: mischievous  
 tendrel zangpo: good omen  
 teogho: jacket made of cotton or silk worn over the *kira*  
 terma: spiritual treasure of knowledge and wisdom  
 terton: predestined one who is to find the treasure  
 thab: fireplace in the open, usually consisting of three stones placed close together to hold a vessel  
 thank(a)s: religious painting or scroll of cotton cloth, canvas, silk or brocade applique, or an embroidered picture of religious themes  
 theum: queen  
 thithigem: dove  
 thri: throne or presidential seat  
 tormar: ceremonial offering, usually made of rice or flour in the shape of spirals and religious symbols  
 trho: large metal vessel in which chhang is kept  
 tsechu: annual religious festival held in all the valleys to propitiate the local deities

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tsehou: large cane basket usually carried on the back

tsho: lake

tshomem: goddess that is half-woman and half-serpent found in rivers or lakes

yul: country

zhugthi: ceremonial seat

zoh: bamboo milk container, covered with intricately carved bamboo strips

zohsoi: finish